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SERMONS

BY

J. B. MASSILLON,

BISHOP OF CLERMONT.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

BY WILLIAM DICKSON.

SECOND AMERICAN EDITION,

REVISED AND MATERIALLY CORRECTED.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SERMON XVII.

ON THE DELAY OF CONVERSION.

JOHN i. 23.

I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.

It is in order that he may enter into our hearts that Jesus Christ announces, by John the Baptist, that we have the way to make straight for him, by removing all those obstacles, which, like a wall of separation, rise up between his mercy and our wretchedness. Now, these obstacles are the crimes with which we so often stain ourselves, which always subsist, because it would be necessary to expiate them by penitence, and we expiate them not: these obstacles are the passions by which our heart foolishly allows itself to be carried away, which are always living, because, in order to destroy, it would be necessary to conquer them, and we never conquer them: these obstacles are the temptations by which our innocence is so often led astray, and

which still continue fatal to our resolutions, because, in place of yielding to that inward inclination which leads us towards them, it would be necessary to shun them; and we shun them not: in a word, the true and only manner of making straight the way of our hearts for Jesus Christ, is that of changing our mode of life, and of being sincerely converted.

But, though the business of our conversion be the most important with which we can be entrusted here below, seeing that through it alone we can draw Jesus Christ into our hearts; though it be the only one truly interesting to us, since on it depends our eternal happiness; yet, O deplorable blindness! it is never considered by us as a matter either of urgency or of importance; it is continually put off to some other time, as if times and seasons were at our disposal. What wait you, Christians, my brethren? Jesus Christ ceaseth not to forewarn you, by his ministers, of the evils which threaten your impenitence, and the delay of your conversion; he hath long announced to you, through our mouth, that, unless you repent, you most assuredly shall perish.

Nor is he satisfied with publicly warning you through the voice of his ministers: he speaks to you in the bottom of your heart, and continually whispers to you, Is it not time now to withdraw yourself from that guilt in which, for so many years, you have been plunged, and from which scarcely any thing but a miracle can now extricate you? Is it not time to restore peace to your heart, to banish from it that chaos of passions which has occasioned all the misfortunes of your life; to prepare for yourself at least some few happy and tranquil

days, and, after having lived so long for a world which hath always left you unsatisfied and uneasy, at last to live for a God who alone can give peace and tranquillity to your heart? Will you not at last bestow a thought upon your eternal interests, and, after a life wholly frivolous, return to the true one; and, in serving God, adopt the only wise plan which man can pursue upon the earth? Are you not weary with struggling against those remorses which tear you, that sadness of guilt which weighs you down, that sense of the insufficiency of the world which every-where pursues you? And do you not wish to finish at last your misfortunes and your disquietudes, by finishing your crimes?

What shall we reply to that inward voice which hath so long spoken in the bottom of our hearts? What pretexts shall we oppose? *1st*, That we are not, as yet, furnished by God with the succours necessary to enable us to quit the unhappy state in which we live. *2dly*, That we are at present too much engaged by the passions to think of a new life. That is to say, that we form two pretexts for delaying our conversion; the first drawn from the part of God, the second from within ourselves. The first which justifies us, by accusing God of being deficient towards us; the second which comforts us, by alleging to ourselves our inability of, as yet, returning to him. Thus we delay our conversion, under the belief that grace is wanting, and that, as yet, God desireth us not; we delay our conversion, because we flatter ourselves that some future day we shall be less attached to the world and to the passions, and more in a situation to begin a Christian and an

orderly life: Two pretexts which are continually in the mouth of sinners, and which I now propose to combat.

PART I. It is not in these times alone that men have dared to throw upon the Deity the blame of their transgressions, and have tried to render his wisdom and his goodness responsible for their iniquitous weakness. It may be said that this blindness entered with sin into the world; the first man sought not elsewhere an excuse for his guilt; and, far from appeasing the Lord whom he had so lately disobeyed, by an humble confession of his wretchedness, he accused him of having been himself the cause of his disobedience, in associating him with woman.

And such, my brethren, is the illusion of almost all souls living in guilt, and who delay to a future day that conversion required of them by God. They are continually repeating that conversion does not depend upon us; that it is the Lord who must change their heart, and bestow upon them that faith and grace which they, as yet, have not. Thus they are not satisfied with provoking his anger, by delaying their conversion; they even insult him, by laying upon him the blame of their obstinacy, and of the delay of their penitence. Let us now overthrow the error and impiety of this disposition; and, in order to render the criminal more inexcusable in his impenitence, let us deprive him at least of this pretext.

You tell us then, *1st*, that if you had faith, and were thoroughly convinced of the truth of religion, you would be converted; but that faith is a gift of God

which you expect from him alone, and that as soon as he shall have given it to you, you will easily and heartily begin to adopt your resolution. Your first pretext then is, the want of faith, and that God alone can give it.

But I ought first to ask you, How have you then lost that faith so precious? You have received it in your baptism; a Christian education hath cherished it in your heart; it had grown up with you; it was an inestimable talent which the Lord had entrusted to you in selecting you from so many infidel nations, and in marking you, from the moment you quitted your mother's womb, with the seal of salvation. What have you then done with the gift of God? Who hath effaced from your forehead that sign of eternal election? Is it not the corruption of the passions, and that blindness which has been their just punishment? Did you suspect the faith of your fathers before you became dissolute and abandoned? Is it not yourself who have extinguished in the dirt that celestial torch, which the church, in regenerating you, had placed in your hand, to enlighten your way through the obscurities and the dangers of this life? Why, then, accuse God of that waste which you have made of his favours? To him belongs the right of reclaiming his own gift; to him it belongs to make you accountable for the talent which he had entrusted to your care; to say to you: "Wicked and ungrateful servant, what had I done for "others, that I had not done for thee? I had embel"lished thy soul with the gift of faith, and with the "mark of my children: thou hast cast that precious "jewel before unclean animals; thou hast extinguish-

"ed faith, and the light that I had placed within thee: "I have long, in spite of thyself, preserved it in thy "heart: I have caused it to outlive all those impious "efforts which thou hast made to extinguish it, because "it was troublesome to thy debaucheries: thou know- "est how much it hath cost thee to throw off the yoke "of faith, and to be what thou now art: and this "dreadful state, which is the just punishment of thy "crimes, is now become their only excuse! And "thou sayest, that the want of faith is no fault of "thine, seeing it depends not on man, thou, who hast "had such difficulty to eradicate it from thy soul! "And thou pretendest that it is I who ought to give it "to thee, if I wish thee to serve me, I, who reclaim "it from thee, and who so justly complain that thou "hast lost it!" Enter into argument with your Lord, and justify yourself, if you have any reply to make to him.

And to make you, my dear hearer, more sensible of all the weakness of this pretext; you complain that you want faith; you say that you would wish to have it; that happy are those who are feelingly convinced, and that, in their state, no suffering can affect them. But, if you wish for faith, if you believe that nothing is so fortunate as that state of being truly convinced of the truths of salvation, and of the illusion of all that passeth away; if you envy the lot of those souls who have attained to that desirable state; if this be the case, behold then that faith which you are expecting, and which you thought to have lost. What more do you require to know, in order to terminate a criminal life, than the happiness of those who have forsaken it

in order to labour towards their salvation? You say that you wish faith; but you have it from the moment that you think it worthy of a wish; at least you have enough of it to know that the greatest happiness of man, is that of sacrificing all to its promises. Now, the souls whom we daily see returning to their God, are not led by other lights: the righteous, who bear his yoke, are not sustained or animated by other truths; we ourselves, who serve him, know nothing more of it.

Cease then to deceive yourself, and to await what you already have. Ah! It is not faith that is wanting to you, it is the inclination to fulfil the duties it imposes on you: it is not your doubts, but your passions which restrain you. You know not yourself; you willingly persuade yourself that you want faith, because that pretext which you oppose to grace, is less humiliating to self-love, than that of the shameful vices which detain you. But mount to the source; your doubts have sprung solely from your irregular mode of living: regulate then your manners, and you will see nothing in faith but what is certain and consoling: be chaste, modest, and temperate, and I answer for that faith which you believe to have lost: live uprightly, and you will find little difficulty in believing.

And a proof of the truth of what I tell you, is, that if, in order to be converted, nothing more were to be required, than to bend your reason to mysteries which exceed our comprehension; if a Christian life were accompanied with no other difficulties than certain apparent contradictions, which it is necessary to believe, without being able to comprehend them; if faith proposed the fulfilment of no irksome duties; if, in order

to change your life, it were not necessary to renounce passions the most lively, and attachments the most dear to your heart; if the matter in question were merely a point of opinion and of belief, without either the heart or the passions being interested in it, you would no longer have any difficulty in yielding to it; you would view in the light of madmen, those who, for a moment, could hesitate between difficulties of pure speculation, of which the belief can be followed by no injury, and an eternity of misery, which, after all, may be the lot of unbelievers. Faith appears difficult to you, therefore, not because it holds out mysteries, but because it regulates the passions: it is the sanctity of its maxims which revolts us, and not the incomprehensibility of its secrets: you are therefore corrupt, but not an unbeliever.

And, in effect, notwithstanding all your pretended doubts in regard to faith, you are sensible that avowed unbelief is a horrible side to take; you dare not determine upon it: it is a quicksand, under which you have a glimpse of a thousand gulfs which fill you with horror, in which you find no consistency, and on which you could not venture to tread with a firm and confident foot: you continually say to yourself, that there is no risk in devoting one's self to God; that, after all, and even admitting the uncertainty of any thing after this life, the alternative is too horrible not to require precautions; and that, even in an actual uncertainty of the truths of faith, the cause of the godly would always be the wisest and the safest. Your state, therefore, is rather the vague determination of an agitated heart, which dreads to break its chains, than a real and

actual doubt in regard to faith, and a fear lest, in sacrificing to it all your iniquitous pleasures, your pains and time would be lost: your uncertainties are efforts, which you make to defend yourself against a remnant of faith, which still inwardly enlightens you, rather than a proof that you have already lost it. Seek no longer then to convince yourself; rather endeavour to oppose no more that internal conviction which enlightens and condemns you. Follow the dictates of your own heart; be reconciled to yourself; allow a conscience to speak, which never fails to plead within you for faith, against your own excesses; in a word, hearken to yourself, and you will be a believer.

But it is admitted, you will say, that if nothing more were to be required than to believe, that would cost little. This is the second pretext of the dilatory sinners; it is the want of grace, and that they await it: conversion is not the work of man, and it belongs to God alone to change the heart.

Now, I say that this pretext, so vulgar, so often repeated in the world, and so continually in the mouths of almost all who live in guilt, is unjust; if we consider the sinner who alleges it; if we view it on the part of God, on whom he lays the blame, it is rash and ungrateful; if we examine it in itself, it is foolish and unwarrantable.

In the first place, if we consider the sinner who alleges it, it is unjust; for you complain that God hath not yet touched you, that you feel no relish for devotion, and that you must wait the coming of that relish before you can think of changing your mode of life. But, full of passions as you are, can you reasonably

expect or exact of God, that he shall ever make you feel a decided inclination for piety? Do you wish that your heart, still plunged in debauchery, should feel the pure delights and the chaste attractions of virtue? You are similar to a man who, nourishing himself with gall and wormwood, should afterwards complain that every thing feels bitter to his palate. You say that if God wish you to serve him, it is in his power alone to give you a relish for his service: You who every day defile your heart by the meanest excesses; you who every moment place a fresh chaos between God and you; you, who in a word, by new debaucheries, finally extinguish in your soul even those sentiments of natural virtue, those happy impressions of innocence and of regularity born with you, which might have been the means of recalling you to virtue and righteousness. O man! art thou then unjust only when the wisdom and justice of thy God is called in question?

But I say farther, that were God even to create in your heart that relish for, and those feelings of salvation which you await, dissolute and corrupt as you are, would you even feel the operation of his grace? Were he to call upon you, plunged as you now are in the pleasures of a life altogether worldly, would you even hear his voice? Were he to touch your heart, would that feeling of grace produce the effect of conversion, extinguished as it would immediately be by the ardour and the frenzy of profane passions? And, after all, this God of long suffering and of patience still operates in your heart; he still poureth out within you the riches of his goodness and of his mercy. Ah! it is not his grace which fails you, but you re-

ceive it into a heart so full of vice and wretchedness, that it is ineffectual; it excites no feeling there of contrition; it is a spark which, falling into a sink of filth and corruption, is extinguished the moment it falls.

Reflect then, my dear hearer, and comprehend all the injustice of your pretexts. You complain that God is wanting to you, and that you await his grace to be converted; but is there a sinner in whose mouth that complaint would be more unjust than from your lips? Trace back the whole course of your life; follow it from the earliest period down to this day. The Lord had covered you from your birth with his blessings; he had placed in you an happy disposition, a noble spirit, and all the inclinations most favourable to virtue; he had even provided for you, in the bosom of a family, domestic comforts, and pious and godly examples. The mercies of the Lord went still farther; he hath preserved you from a thousand dangers; through his goodness you have outlived occasions where your friends, and perhaps the accomplices of your debaucheries, have fallen a sacrifice to the scourge of war: to recal you to him, he hath spared neither afflictions, causes of disgust, nor disgraces; he hath torn from you the criminal objects of your passions, even at the moment when your heart was most strongly attached to them; he hath so mercifully conducted your destiny, that a thousand obstacles have continually thwarted your passions, that you have never been able to arrive at the accomplishment of all your criminal wishes, and that something hath always been wanting to your iniquitous happiness; he hath formed for you serious engagements and duties, which in spite of yourself, have

imposed on you the obligation of a prudent and regular life in the eyes of men; he hath not permitted your conscience to become hardened in iniquity, and you have never been able to succeed in calming your feelings of remorse, or in living tranquilly in guilt; not a day hath past in which you have not felt the emptiness of the world and the horror of your situation; amidst all your pleasures and excesses, concience hath awoke, and you have never succeeded in lulling your secret disquiets but by promising to yourself a future change. A just and a merciful God urges and pursues you every where since you have forsaken him: he hath fixed himself to you, says a prophet, like a worm which attaches itself to the garment, continually to gnaw your heart, and to render his incessant biting a wholesome remedy to your soul. Even while I am now speaking to you, he worketh within you, filleth my mouth with these holy truths, and placeth me here to proclaim them to you, for the sole purpose of recalling perhaps you alone. What then is your whole life but one continued succession of favours? Who are you yourself but a child of affection, and the work of God's mercies? Unjust that thou art! And canst thou dare, after this, to complain that his grace is wanting, thou, on whom alone on the earth the Lord seemeth to cast his regards; thou, in whose heart he so continually operateth, as though, of all men, he had only thee to save; thou, in a word, whose every moment is a fresh grace, and whose greatest guilt shall one day be, that of having received too many, and of having constantly abused them.

But, to finish your overthrow, upon what grounds do you say that you want grace? You doubtless say so, because you feel that in your present state conversion would require too many sacrifices; but you then believe that, with grace, you are converted without any sacrifice on your part, without any self-denial, and almost without being sensible of it yourself? You believe, then, that to have grace is to have no more passions to conquer, no more chains to break, no more temptations to overcome; that it is to be regenerated through penitence, without tears, without pain, without sorrow? Ah! I assure you that on this footing you will never possess that chimerical grace; for conversion must always require many sacrifices; be the grace what it may, you will always be required to make heroical efforts to repress your passions, to tear yourself from the most beloved objects, and to sacrifice every thing which may yet captivate you. Look around, and see if no sacrifices are required of those who are daily returning to their God; yet they are favoured with grace, since it is that which delivers them and changes their heart. Inquire of them if grace render every thing easy and smooth; if it leave nothing more for self-love to undergo. Ask of them if they have not had a thousand struggles to sustain, a thousand obstacles to overcome, a thousand passions to moderate; and you will know if to have grace is to be converted without any exertion on your part. Conversion is therefore a painful sacrifice, a laborious baptism, a grievous delivery, a victory which supposes combats and fatigues. Grace, I confess, softens them all; but it by no means operates so as to leave

nothing more to overcome; and if, in order to change your life, you await a grace of that nature, I announce to you that such never existed, and that so absurdly to await your salvation and deliverance, is to be absolutely bent upon perishing.

But, if the pretext of the default of grace be unjust on the side of the sinner who alleges it, it is not less rash and ungrateful with regard to God, on whom he pretends to fix the blame.

For you say that God is the master, and that, when he shall want you, he will perfectly know how to find you; that is to say, that you have only to leave him solely to act, and that, without giving yourself any trouble with respect to your salvation, he, when so inclined, will know how to change your heart; that is to say, that you have only to pass your life in pleasures and in guilt, and that without any interference on your part, without your bestowing even a thought upon it, without bringing to that conversion which you expect, any other preparation than a whole life of debauchery and constant opposition to his grace, he will know how to obtain you, when his moment shall be come; that is to say, that your salvation, that great, that only business which you have upon the earth, is no longer a concern of yours; and that the Lord, who hath given you that alone to manage, who hath commanded you to give it the preference over all others, and even to neglect every other in order to devote yourself to it alone, hath nevertheless absolutely discharged you from the trust, in order to take it wholly upon himself. Shew us then this promise in some new gospel; for you well know, that it is no where to

be found in that of Jesus Christ. "The sinner," says the prophet Isaiah, "hath nothing but foolish things "wherewith to justify himself; and his heart worketh "iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error "against the Lord."

Lastly, this pretext is foolish in itself; for you say that you want grace: I have already replied, that you deceive yourself; that, if candid, you will acknowledge that grace hath never been wanting to you; that you have more than once felt its salutary impressions; that, had so obstinate a resistance not been opposed by your hardness of heart and impenitence, it would have triumphed over your passions; that God, who wisheth all men to be saved, who out of nothing hath drawn reasonable beings, solely to praise, to bless, and to glorify him; in a word, who hath only made us for himself, hath opened to you, my dear hearer, as well as to so many other sinners, a thousand ways of conversion, which would have infallibly recalled you ere now to the right path, had you not obstinately shut your ears against his voice. You want grace, you say: what do you thereby pretend! would you wish to have it understood, that God who is our Father, and of whom we are the children; who hath an affection for us infinitely surpassing that of the tenderest mother for an only son, that a God so good leaves us, through want of assistance, in an actual incapacity of well-doing? But do you reflect that such language would be a blasphemy against the wisdom of God, and the justification of every crime? Are you then ignorant, that whatever be the blow given to our liberty by the fall of our first parent, grace is still, however, left to

us; that neither law nor duties would longer be imposed upon man, had he not the real and actual power of fulfilling them; that religion, far from being an aid and a consolation, would consequently be no longer but a vexation and a snare; that if, notwithstanding all the cares which God hath for our salvation, we perish, it is always the fault of our own will, and not through a default of grace; that we are individually the authors of our misery and destruction; that it has depended upon ourselves to have avoided them; and that a thousand sinners, with neither more grace nor assistance than we, have broken their chains, and have rendered glory to God and to his mercies, by a life altogether new.

But, granting that these truths were less certain, and that, in reality, you, my dear hearer, want grace, it would equally be true then, that God hath altogether forsaken you; that you are marked with a character of reprobation, and that your state cannot be worse. For to be without grace is surely the most terrible of all situations, and the most certain presage of eternal condemnation. And it is that horrible thought, nevertheless, which comforts you, which justifies in your eyes your tranquillity in guilt, which makes you delay your conversion, without trouble or remorse, and which even serves as an excuse for all your excesses; which is as much as to say, that you are delighted with the want of this precious grace; that you continually say, to yourself, with satisfaction, God wisheth me not as yet; I have only to live, in the mean while, tranquilly in guilt; his grace will not yet come; that is to say, that you wish it not, and that you would even be sorry were

it to come to break those chains which you still love. To you, the want of grace ought to be the most fearful and the most powerful inducement to extricate yourself from your deplorable state; and it is the only one which quiets and stops you.

Besides, the more you delay, the less will you have of grace; for the more you delay, the more do your crimes increase, the more doth God estrange himself from you; his mercies become exhausted, his moments of indulgence slip away, your measure becomes full, and the dreadful term of his wrath approaches: and if it be true that you have not at present sufficient grace to be converted, you will not, in a little time, have wherewithal even to comprehend that you have occasion either for penitence or conversion.

It is not grace then that you have to accuse, it is yourself. Did Augustine, during his feeble desires of conversion, tax the Lord with the delay of his penitence? Ah! he sought no further for the reason of it, than in the weakness and the licentiousness of his own heart. "I dragged on," said he, "a heart diseased "and torn with remorse, accusing myself alone for all "my evils, and for all the delays which I started "against a new life. I turned me in my chains, as "though they should break off themselves, without "any effort on my part. For thee, Lord, never hast "thou ceased to chasten my heart with inward sorrows, "continually causing there, through a merciful seve-"rity, the most pungent remorse, which embittered "every comfort of my life. Nevertheless, the amuse-"ments of the world, which I had always and still "loved, withheld me; they secretly whispered to me.

"Thou meanest, then, to renounce every pleasure? "From this moment, then, thou biddest an eternal "farewell to all that hath hitherto rendered life agreea- "ble to thee? What! Shall it no more be permitted "thee to see those persons who have been so dear "to thee; shalt thou henceforth be separated from "thy companions in pleasure, be banished from their "assemblies, and be obliged to deny thyself the most "innocent delights, and all the comforts of society? "And is it possible that thou canst believe thyself ca- "pable of supporting the sad weariness of a life so "gloomy, so void, so monotonous, and so different "from the one thou hast hitherto led?"

Behold where this half-contrite sinner found the cause of his delays and of his resistance; it was the dread of having to renounce his passions, and of being unable to support the step of a new life, and not any default of grace: and such is precisely the situation in which you are, and what you say every day to yourself.

For, after all, supposing that grace is wanting to you, what do you thence conclude? That the crimes into which you continually plunge yourself will not condemn you, should death surprise you in that deplorable state? You would not dare to say so. That you have only to live tranquil in your debaucheries till God shall touch you, and till grace shall be given to you? But it is the height of folly to expect grace, while you render yourself every day more and more unworthy of it. That you are not guilty before God of the delay of your conversion, seeing it depends not on you? But all delaying sinners, who die impenitent,

would then be justified, and hell would no longer be but for the just who are converted. That you ought no more to concern yourself with your salvation, but to leave it to chance, without giving yourself any uneasiness or trouble with regard to it? But that is the expedient of despair and of impiety. That the moment of your conversion is marked, and that a little more or less of debauchery will neither advance nor retard it an instant? But, according to that doctrine, you have only to pierce your heart, or plunge yourself into the waves, under the pretext that the moment of your death is determined, and that such madness will neither hasten nor retard it a single instant. "O man!" cries the apostle, in replying to the folly and to the impiety of this pretext, "is it thus that thou con-"temnest the abundant goodness of thy God? Art "thou ignorant that his patience in suffering thy de-"baucheries, far from authorizing them, ought to re-"call thee to penitence; and, nevertheless, it is his "long-forbearance itself which hardens thee in guilt; "and through thine obstinacy of heart thou amassest "an overflowing treasure of wrath for that terrible "day which shall surprise thee, and on which shall "be rendered to every one according to his works?"

The only rational consequence, therefore, that you could be permitted to draw, supposing that grace is wanting to you, is, that you, more earnestly than any other, ought to pray to obtain it; to neglect nothing to soften an irritated God, who hath withdrawn himself from your heart; to overcome by your importunities his resistance; to remove, in the mean while, whatever withholds his grace from your heart; to make straight

the way for him; to throw aside all the obstacles which have hitherto rendered it ineffectual to you; to deny yourself every opportunity which may endanger your innocence, and shut your heart against the holy inspirations: such is the Christian and prudent manner of rendering glory to God, of confessing that he alone is the master of hearts, and that every blessing and gift proceed from him. But to say, as you continually do, without changing in any respect your disorderly manners, "When God shall want me, "he knoweth how to find me," is to say, "I wish him "not as yet; I have no occasion for him; I live happy "and contented: when he shall force me, and I can "no longer avoid him, then I will yield; but, in the "mean time, I will enjoy my prosperity, and the pri-"vilege which he granteth to me of delaying my con-"version." What a shocking preparation for that precious grace which changeth the heart! Such is, however, all that an impenitent soul can adduce for confidently awaiting it.

Such are the pretexts which the sinner who delays his conversion draws from the part of God. Let us now examine those which he takes from within himself.

PART II. It is astonishing, my brethren, that, life being so short, the moment of death so uncertain, every instant so precious, conversions so rare, the examples of those who are taken unawares so frequent, and futurity so awful, so many frivolous pretexts can be urged for delaying a change of life. In all other dangers which threaten either our life, our happiness, or our property, precautions are prompt and ready, the

danger alone is dubious and distant; here the danger is certain and present, and the precautions are always uncertain and remote. It seems either that salvation is an arbitrary thing, or that our life is in our own hands, or that the time for our penitence hath been promised to us, or that to die impenitent is no great misfortune, so strongly do all sinners lull themselves with this hope of being one day converted, without ever attempting a change of life. And what is still more incomprehensible in the delay of their penitence is, that they all admit the necessity of their conversion, the bad state of their conscience, and that they all consider death in that unprepared state as the worst of evils; and, nevertheless, that they all defer withdrawing from it, under pretexts so childish, that even the gravity of the Christian pulpit suffers in refuting and overthrowing them.

Age, the passions, the consequences of a change of life, which they dread the being able to support; such are the vain pretexts inwardly alleged for delaying that conversion which God demands of us.

I say, in the first place, Age. They wish to allow the years of youth to pass away, to which an occupation so serious as that of piety seems little suited; they wait a certain season of life, when, the first bloom of youth being effaced, the manners become more sedate, the attention more exact, the world less watchful of us, even the mind riper and more capable of supporting that grand undertaking; they promise themselves to labour at it, and that they will not then allow any thing to divert them from it.

But, it would be natural to ask you first, who hath told you that you shall arrive at the term which you

point out to yourself; that death shall not surprise you in the course of those years which you still allot to the world and to the passions; and that the Lord, whom you do not expect till the evening, shall not arrive in the morning, and when you least think of it? Is youth a certain safeguard against death? To say nothing of what happens every day to the rest of mankind, see if, even in confining yourself to the small number of your friends and of your relations, you can find none for whom the justice of God hath dug a grave in the first years of their existence; who, like the flower of the field, have withered before the close of day, and left you only the melancholy regret of seeing the blossoms of life so speedily blasted. Fool! Thy soul is to be re-demanded perhaps at the opening of thy race; and those projects of conversion, which thou deferrest to a future period, what shall they avail thee? Those great resolutions, which thou promisest to thyself to put in execution one day, shall they change for thine eternal misery, should death anticipate them, as it every day doth in a thousand instances, and leave thee only the unavailing regret of having vainly formed them?

But, even granting that death shall not take you unawares, I ask you, upon what foundation do you promise yourself, that age shall change your heart, and incline you more than you are at present to a new life? Did age change the heart of Solomon? Ah! It was then that his passions rose to the highest, and that his shameful frailty no longer knew any bounds. Did age prepare Saul for his conversion? Ah! It was then that, to his past errors, he added superstition, impiety, hard-

ness of heart, and despair. Perhaps in advancing in age you will leave off certain loose manners, because the disgust alone which follows them will have withdrawn you from them; but you will not thereby be converted: You will no longer live in debauchery; but you will not repent, you will not do penance, your heart will not be changed: You will still be worldly, ambitious, voluptuous, and sensual: You will live tranquil in that state, because you will then have but the disposition to those vices, without giving yourself up to their excesses. Years, example, long habit of the world, will have served only to harden your conscience, to substitute indolence and a worldly wisdom in the room of the passions, and to efface that sense of religion, which, in the youthful period of life, is left in the soul as yet fearful and timorous; you will die impenitent.

And, if you suppose this to be merely an impulse of zeal, and not a truth founded on experience, examine what passes every day before you; view all those who have grown old in the world, and who, through age alone, have withdrawn from its pleasures; the love of the world is extinguished only with their lives: under different exteriors, which are changed solely through decency, you see the same relish for the world, the same inclination, the same ardour for pleasures, a youthful heart in a changed and worn-out body. The delights of our younger years are recalled with satisfaction; the imagination pleases itself with reviving all that time and age have wrested from us; a blooming youth, and its attendant amusements, are regarded with envy; all of them are entered into which can be

thought in any degree compatible with the sedateness proper to advanced age; pretexts are formed for still mingling in certain pleasures with decency, and without being exposed to the public ridicule. Lastly, in proportion as the world flies from and deserts us, it is pursued with more relish than ever; a long acquaintance with it hath served only to render it more necessary to us, and to render us incapable of doing without it; and age hath never as yet been the cause of conversion.

But, even admitting that this misfortune were not to be dreaded, the Lord, is he not the God of all times and of all ages? Is there a single one of our days which belongs not to him, and which he hath left to us for the world and for vanity? Is he not even jealous of the first-fruits of our heart and of our life, figured by those first-fruits of the earth, which were commanded by the law to be offered up to him? Why then would you retrench from him the fairest portion of your years, to consecrate it to Satan and to his works? Is life too long to be wholly employed for the glory of the Lord who hath given it to us, and who promiseth to us an eternal one? Is youth too precious to be devoted towards becoming worthy of the eternal possession of the Supreme Being? You reserve, then, for him, only the remains and the dregs of your passions and life! And it is precisely as if you said to him, Lord, so long as I shall be fit for the world and its pleasures, think not that I shall turn towards or seek thee; so long as the world shall be pleased with me, I can never think of devoting myself to thee: afterwards, indeed, when it shall begin to neglect and to forsake me, then I will turn me towards thee; I will say to thee, Lo! I am

here! I will pray thee to accept a heart which the world hath rejected, and which reluctantly finds itself under the hard necessity of bestowing itself on thee; but, till then, expect nothing from me but perfect indifference, and a thorough neglect: after all, thou art only entitled to our services when we ourselves are good for nothing else; we are always sure, at last, of finding thee; all times are the same to thee: but, after a certain season of life, we are unfitted for the world, and, while yet time, it is proper to enjoy it before it deserts us. Ah! Soul unworthy of ever deserving the mercies of a God whom you treat with such insult! And do you believe that he will then accept of an homage so forced, and so disgraceful to his glory, he, who taketh no delight but in voluntary sacrifices, he, who hath no need of man, and who favoureth him when he deigneth to accept even his purest vows, and most sincere homages?

The prophet Isaiah formerly censured, in these terms, those who worshipped vain idols: "You take," said he to them, "a cedar from Lebanon; you cut off "the best and the handsomest parts of it for your "wants, your pleasures, the luxury and ornament of "your palaces; and when you know not how to em- "ploy otherwise the remnant, you carve it into a vain "idol, and offer up to it ridiculous vows and homa- "ges." And I in my turn might say to you, you set apart from your life the fairest and the most flourishing of your years, to indulge your fancies and your iniquitous passions; and when you know not to what purpose to devote the remainder, and it becomes useless to the world and to pleasure, then you make an idol of

it; you make it serve for religion; you form to yourself of it, a false, a superficial, and inanimate virtue, to which you reluctantly consecrate the wretched remains of your passions and of your debaucheries. O my God! is this then regarding thee as a jealous God, whom the slightest stain in the purest offerings wounds and offends, or as a vain idol, which feels not the indignity and the hypocrisy of the homages offered up to it?

Yes, my brethren, nothing can be reaped in an advanced age but what has been sown in the younger years of life. If you sow in corruption, said the apostle, you will reap in corruption: you are continually acknowledging that we always die as we have lived; that the character and disposition change not; that we bear within us in old age all the defects and all the desires of our younger years; and that nothing is so fortunate for us as to have formed laudable inclinations from an early period, and, as the prophet said, to have accustomed ourselves from the tenderest youth to bear the yoke of the Lord.

And, in effect, when we should attend solely to the quiet of our life; when we should have no other interest in view than that of securing peaceful and happy days to ourselves here below, what happiness to anticipate, and to stifle in their birth, by bending them from the first towards virtue, so many violent passions which afterwards tear the heart, and occasion all the sorrows and misery of our lives. What happiness, to have grafted on ourselves only gentle and innocent ideas, to spare ourselves the fatal experience of so many criminal pleasures, which for ever corrupt the heart, defile

the imagination, engender a thousand shameful and unruly fancies, accompanying us even in virtue, outliving our crimes, and frequently becoming new ones themselves! What happiness, to have created innocent and tranquil pleasures for ourselves in these younger years; to have accustomed the heart to be contented with them; not to have contracted the sad necessity of being unable to do without violent and criminal gratifications, and not to have rendered insupportable, by a long habit of warm and tumultuous passions, the gentleness and the tranquillity of virtue and of innocence! How do these younger years, passed in modesty and in the detestation of vice, attract blessings on the remainder of life! How attentive to all our ways do they render the Lord! And how much do they render us the well-beloved object of his cares and of his paternal kindness!

But nobody denies, you will say, the happiness of being early devoted to God, and of having been able to resist all the temptations of youth and of pleasure. But that such is not your case; you have followed the common track; the torrent of the world and of the passions has swept all before it; you find yourselves, even now, under engagements too intimate and powerful to think of breaking them; you wait a more favourable situation; and you promise yourselves, that, when the passion which now enslaves you shall be extinguished, you will never again enter into new bonds, but will heartily range yourselves on the side of duty and of virtue. Thus the passions and the engagements, from which you say it is impossible, as yet, to withdraw, afford you a second pretext.

But, in the first place, are you quite certain that this more favourable situation which you await, in order to return to God, will arrive? Who hath revealed to you the course and the duration of the passions which at present retain you? Who hath marked limits to them, and said, like the Lord to the troubled waters, "Hi-"therto shalt thou come, and no farther?" Can you tell when they shall have an end? Can you take upon you to say that they shall one day be terminated? That they shall be ended at least before yourself? Would you be the first sinner surprised in his deplorable passions? Do not almost all around you die in that melancholy state? Do the ministers, called in to the assistance of the dying, find many sinners on the bed of death, who, for a length of time, have quitted their former habits in order to prepare themselves for that last moment? What do we find there but souls still bound with a thousand chains, which death alone can break asunder?—but inexplicable consciences, if I may venture to say so, and still enveloped in the chaos of a dissolute life? What indeed do we expect on these occasions but unavailing regrets on that dreadful surprisal, and vain protestations of the different measures they would have adopted, had they been able to have foreseen it? What are the usual offices of our ministry in these last moments? To enlighten consciences which ought then to need only consolation; to assist them in recalling crimes which we should then have only to exhort them to forget; to make the dying sinner sensible of his debaucheries, we who should then have to support and to animate him with the remembrance of his virtues; in a word, to

open the dark concealments of his heart, we who should then have to open only the bosom of Abraham, and the treasures of an immortal glory for the soul on the point of disengaging itself from the body. Such are the melancholy offices which we shall one day perhaps have to render to you: you, in your turn, will call upon us, and, in place of a soothing conversation with you on the advantages which a holy death promises to the believer, we shall then be solely employed in receiving the narration of the crimes of your life.

But, should your passions not extend even to that last hour, the more you delay, the deeper do you allow the roots of guilt to become; the more do your chains form new folds round your heart, the more does that leaven of corruption which you carry within you, spread itself, ferment, and corrupt all the capacity of your soul. Judge of this by the progress which the passion has hitherto made in your heart. At first you allowed yourself only timid liberties, to quiet yourself in which, you still sought some shadow of innocence: afterwards, it was only dubious actions, in which it was still difficult to distinguish guilt from a venial trespass: licentiousness closely followed; but striking excesses were still rare: you reproached yourself in the very moment of their commission: you were unable to bear them long upon a conscience still alarmed at its state: backslidings are insensibly multiplied: licentiousness is become a fixed and habitual state: the voice of conscience has become feeble against the empire of the passions: guilt is become necessary to you: it hath no longer excited remorse: you have swallowed it like water, which passes unfelt, and with-

out making itself sensible to the palate by any particular flavour. The more you advance, the more does the venom gain ground; the weaker does any residue of strength, which modesty, reason, and grace had placed in you, become; the more does what was yet wholesome in your soul become infected and defiled. What folly, then, to allow wounds to become old and corrupt, under pretence that they will afterwards be more easily cured! And what do you gain by delaying, but render your evils more incurable, and take away from the hope of your conversion, every resource which might still be left to you!

You perhaps flatter yourself that there are no lasting passions, and that, sooner or later, time and disgust will withdraw you from them.

To this I answer, *1st*, That, in all probability, you will indeed become tired of the objects which at present enslave you, but that your passions will not be consequently at an end. You will doubtless form new ties, but you will not form to yourself a new heart. There are no eternal passions, I confess; but corruption and licentiousness are almost always so: the passions which are terminated solely by disgust, always leave the heart open for the reception of some other; and it is commonly a new fire which expels and extinguishes the first. Call to your remembrance what has hitherto happened to you: You firmly thought, that, were such an engagement once at an end, you should then be free, and wholly at liberty to return to your God; you fixed upon that happy moment as the commencement of your penitence: that engagement hath been terminated; death, inconstancy, disgust, or some

other accident hath broken it; and, nevertheless, you are not converted: new opportunities have offered: you have formed new ties: you have forgotten your former resolutions; and your last state is become worse than the first. The passions which are not extinguished by grace, serve merely to light up and to prepare the heart for new ones.

I answer, *2dly*, Should even all your criminal engagements be ended, and no particular object remain to interest your heart; if time and disgust alone have effected this, yet will not your conversion be more advanced. You will still cling to all, in no longer holding to any thing; you will find yourself in a certain vague state of indolence and insensibility, more removed from the kingdom of God than even the ardour of mad passions; your heart, free from any particular passion, will be as if filled with an universal passion; or, if I may so speak, with an immense void which will wholly occupy it. It will be by so much the more difficult for you to quit this state, as you will have nothing sufficiently striking to catch at. You will find yourself without vigour, taste, or inclination for salvation; it is a calm from which you will find it more difficult to extricate yourself than even from the tempest; for the same winds which cause the storm, may sometimes drive us fortunately into port; but the greater the calm is, the more certainly it leads to destruction.

But, *lastly*, you say, We would willingly change and pursue a more reasonable, and more Christian life; we feel the emptiness of the world and of all its pleasures; we enter into amusements, and into certain

kinds of dissipation, without relish, and as if with regret; we would wish to renounce them, and seriously to labour towards our salvation: but this first step startles us; it is a matter of notoriety which engages us with the public, and which we have many doubts of being able to support; we are of a rank which renders the smallest change conspicuous; and we are afraid lest, like so many others, we may act a part that will not be lasting, and consequently, will leave us only the ridicule, without the merit of devotion.

You dread, my dear hearer, the being able to go through with it? What! in delaying your conversion you promise yourself that God shall one day touch you; and in being converted at present, you dare not promise yourself that he will sustain you? You depend upon his mercies while insulting him, and you dare not trust to them when glorifying him? You believe that you have nothing to risk, on his part, in continuing to offend him, and you have no confidence in him when beginning to serve him? O man! where is here that reason, and that rectitude of judgment which thou vauntest so much? And must it be, that, in the business of thy salvation alone, thou art a mass of contradiction, and an incomprehensible paradox?

Besides, might we not with reason say to you, Make a beginning at least; try if, in effect, you will be unable to sustain yourself in the service of God? Is it not worth the trouble of being tried? Does a man, precipitated by the tempest into the sea, and who finds himself on the point of drowning, not strain every nerve, in the first place, to gain the shore by swimming, before he resigns himself to the mercy of the waves?

Would he say to himself, as an excuse for making no effort to save himself, "I shall perhaps be unable to go "through with it; my strength will most likely fail me "by the way?" Ah! He tries, he makes every effort, he struggles against the danger, he labours to the last moment of his strength, and only gives way, at last, when, overpowered by the violence of the waves, he is forced to yield to his evil destiny. You perish, my dear hearer; the waves gain upon you, the torrent sweeps you away; and you hesitate whether you shall try to extricate yourself from the danger; and you waste, in calculating your strength, the only moments left to provide for your safety? You sacrifice, in deliberating, the little time that is left you for the sole purpose of disengaging yourself from the peril which is imminent, and in which so many others are continually perishing before your eyes.

But, lastly, even granting that in the end the various hardships of virtue may overcome your weakness, and that you may find yourself under the necessity of retreating; at any rate, you will always have passed some little time without offending your God; you will always have made some efforts towards appeasing him; you will always have devoted some days to the praise of his holy name: at any rate, it will be a portion cut off from your criminal life, and from that mass of iniquity which you collect for the terrible day of vengeance; you will have acquired, at least, the right of representing your weakness to God, and of saying to him, "Lord, thou beholdest my desires and my weakness; "why, O my God! have I not a heart more constant to "thee, more determined in the cause of truth, more cal-

"lous to the world, and more difficult to be led astray?
"Put an end, O Lord, to mine uncertainties and to mine
"inconstancy; take from the world that dominion which
"it hath over my heart; resume thine ancient rights
"over it, and no longer imperfectly attract me, lest I
"again fly off from thee. I am covered with shame
"at the eternal variations of my life, and they make
"me afraid to raise up mine eyes to thee, or to pro-
"mise a constant fidelity. I have so often broken my
"promises after swearing to thee an eternal love, my
"weakness hath so often led me to forget the happi-
"ness of that engagement, that I have no longer the
"courage to answer for myself. My heart betrays me
"every instant; and a thousand times, on rising from
"thy feet, and with mine eyes still bathed in tears of
"sorrow for having offended thee, an opportunity hath
"led me astray; and the very same infidelities, of
"which I have so lately expressed mine abhorrence,
"have found me, as formerly, weak and unfaithful.
"With a heart so light and so uncertain, what assu-
"rance, O my God! can I give thee? And what, in-
"deed, could I presume to promise myself? I have so
"often thought that my resolutions would now at last
"be constant; I have found myself in moments of
"grace and of compunction, so lively and affecting,
"and which seemed for ever to fix the durability of my
"fidelity, that I see nothing now which can either be
"capable of fixing me, or of affording me a hope of
"that stability in virtue which I have hitherto been
"unable to attain. Let the danger of my situation
"touch thee, O my God! the character of my heart
"discourages and alarms me; I know that inconstan-

"cy in thy holy path is a presage of perdition, and that "the versatile and changeable soul is cursed in thy "holy books. But, while yet sensible of the holy in- "spirations of thy grace, I will once more endeavour "to enter into thy ways; and, if I must perish, I pre- "fer being lost while exerting myself to return to thee, "O my God! who permittest not the soul who sincere- "ly seeketh thee to perish, and who art the only Lord "worthy of being served, to the shocking tranquillity "of an avowed and determined rebellion, and to the "melancholy idea of renouncing all hope of those eter- "nal riches which thou preparest for those who shall "have loved and served thee."

SERMON XVIII.

ON VAIN CONFIDENCE.

LUKE XXIV. 21.

But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.

IN vain had Jesus Christ, during his mortal life, a thousand times declared to his disciples, that they deceived themselves when they calculated upon a reward which had not been merited by crosses and toils: this truth, so little agreeable to nature, had never found a willing audience; and often as the Saviour had tried to undeceive them on the opposite error, they heard not the word, says the Evangelist, and it was hidden from their eyes. Such is still the disposition of the two disciples to whom Jesus Christ condescends to appear, in their way to Emmaus; they expected that their Master would deliver Israel from the yoke of nations, and would cause them to be seated on twelve earthly thrones, without any exertion being necessary on their

part in order to mount them; without the Saviour himself having occasion to suffer, in order to triumph over his enemies.

Besides the mistake which led them to consider Jesus Christ as a temporal deliverer, I have yet to remark another, which appears to me not less dangerous in them, but which is at present more common among us; it is that false trust by which they are persuaded, that, without co-operating towards it themselves, and in leaving to Jesus Christ the whole management of their deliverance, they shall receive the fulfilment of the magnificent promises, which, in his conversations with them upon the earth, he had so often reiterated. Now, my brethren, this false trust, which causes sinners to expect every thing from grace alone, without any co-operation on their part; and to hope for the reward of the holy, although they labour not towards meriting it; this false trust, which always reckons upon the goodness of God whom it offends; which, without combating, promises itself to be crowned, and which always hopes against probability; this false trust, which is unwilling to purchase heaven, and yet expects it, is the most universal and most established error among Christians; and when Jesus Christ shall once more appear upon the earth, he will find many of his unbelieving disciples, who shall have occasion to say to him, "we trusted."

This, my brethren, is what induces me to occupy your time at present upon so important a matter, persuaded that a false trust is the source of condemnation to almost all sinners; that those who are afraid of perishing, never perish; and that I could not better fulfil

my ministry, than by establishing in your hearts those salutary feelings of distrust which lead to precautions and to remedies, and which, in disturbing the peace of sin, leave, in its place, the peace of Jesus Christ, which surpasseth all feeling. Thus, in order to give the subject a proper consideration, I reduce it to two propositions: That there is no disposition more foolish than that of the sinner who presumes, without labouring towards his amendment, is the first: That there is none more injurious to God, is the second. The folly of vain confidence; the wickedness of vain confidence. Let us explain these two truths.

Part I. I am not afraid of openly agreeing with you, my brethren, that the mercies of the Lord are always more abundant than our wicked deeds, and that his goodness may furnish legitimate motives of trust to all sinners. The doctrine which I am about to establish is sufficiently terrible, without adding to it new terrors by concealing part of those truths which may tend to soften it; and if caution be required in this matter, it is rather in not bringing forward all that might alarm the conscience, than in concealing what might tend to console it.

It is true, that every part of the holy books gives us magnificent and soothing ideas of the goodness of God. At one time he is a mild and long-forbearing Master, who awaits the penitence of the sinner; who covers the sins of men, in order to lead them to repentance; who is silent and quiet; who is slow to punish, and delays in order that he may be prevented; who threatens in order to be disarmed: At another time he is a tender Friend, who is never weary of knocking at the gate of

the heart; who flatters, intreats, and solicits us; and who, in order to draw us to himself, employs every thing which ingenious love can invent, to recal a rebellious heart: Again, and lastly, for all would never be said, he is an indefatigable Shepherd, who goes, even through the wildest mountains, in search of his strayed sheep; and, having at last found it, places it upon his shoulders, and is so transported with joy, that even the celestial choir are ordered to celebrate its happy return. It must surely be confessed, that the comfort and the consolation of these images can receive no addition; and every sinner who, after this, despairs, or even gives way to despondency, is the most foolish of men. But do not from thence conclude, that the sinner who presumes is less foolish, or that the mercy of the Lord can be a legitimate foundation of trust to those who are continually desiring their conversion, and yet without labouring towards that great work, promise every thing to themselves from a goodness which their very confidence insults. To convince you of this, before I enter into the main points of my subject, remark, I beg of you, that, among that innumerable crowd of sinners, of every description, with which the world is filled, there is not one who hath not hopes of conversion; not one who, before-hand, considers himself as a child of wrath, and doomed to perish; not one who doth not flatter himself, that, at last, the Lord will one day have pity upon him: the lewd, the ambitious, the worldly, the revengeful, the unjust, all hope, yet no one repents. Now, I mean, at present, to prove to you, that this propensity to false trust is, of all which mankind possess, the most foolish: follow, I

beg of you, my reasons; they are worthy of your attention.

In effect, had I nothing wherewith to make the folly of false trust apparent, but the uncertainty of salvation, felt by a sinner, who has lost the sanctifying grace, no other argument would be required to justify my first proposition. And, when I treat of the uncertainty of his salvation, you can easily comprehend that I am not now speaking of that uncertainty common to all believers, which makes them doubtful whether they be worthy of love or of hatred; whether they shall persevere even to the end, or fall never more to recover themselves: a terrible subject of dread, even for the most righteous! I speak of a more shocking uncertainty, since it does not suppose of the sinner in question, a doubtful state of righteousness and Christian fears, upon backslidings to come, but because it is founded upon a certain state of sin, and upon a repentance which nobody can guarantee to him.

Now, I say that it is the height of folly to presume in this state. For confess it, my dear hearer, inveterate sinner as you are, adhering, as you tranquilly do, to iniquitous passions, in the midst even of all the solemnities of religion, and of all the terrors of the holy word, upon the foolish hope of one day, at last, quitting this deplorable state; you cannot deny that it is at least doubtful whether you shall recover yourself, or, even to the end, remain in your sin. I even grant that you may be full of good desires; but you are not ignorant that desires convert no one, and that the greatest sinners are often those who most long for their conversion. Now, were it equally doubtful, would you be

prudent in remaining tranquil? What! In the frightful uncertainty whether you shall die in your irregularity, or if God shall withdraw you from it; floating, as I may say, between heaven and hell; poised between these two destinies, you could be indifferent on the decision? Hope offers the sweetest and most flattering allurements; and for that reason you would incline to its side? Ah! my dear hearer, were there no more reason to fear than to hope, still you would not be prudent to live in this profound calm.

But even this is not your case; things are far indeed from being equal: in this shocking doubt every sinner may inwardly say: "Shall I expire in mine iniquity, "in the sin in which I now live, and have so long liv- "ed; or shall I die free from it?" The first part is in- "finitely the most probable. For, 1*st*, your own powers are not sufficient to regain that sanctity you have lost; a foreign, supernatural, and heavenly aid is necessary, of which nobody can assure you; in place of which, you need only yourself to remain in your sin: there is nothing in your nature which can revive the grace once lost, no seed of salvation, no principle of spiritual life; and you bear in your heart a fatal source of corruption which may every day produce fresh fruits of death: it is more likely, therefore, that you shall die in your guilt, than it is, that you shall be converted. 2*dly*, Not only is foreign and divine aid necessary, but also a degree of help, uncommon, rare, denied to almost all sinners; in short, a miracle for your conversion; for the conversion of the sinner is one of the greatest prodigies of grace, and you know yourself that such instances are extremely rare in the

world. Now and then, we see some fortunate soul whom God withdraweth from licentiousness; but these are remarkable exertions of the divine mercy, and not in the common track: in place of which, you have only to let things pursue their natural course, and you shall die such as you are; God hath only to follow his ordinary laws, and your destruction is certain; the possibility of your salvation is to be expected only from a singular effort of his power and mercy; the certainty of your condemnation is founded upon the most common of all rules: in a word, to perish, is the ordinary lot of sinners who resemble you; to be converted, is a singularity of which there are few examples. *3dly*, In order to continue in your present state, you have only to follow your inclinations, to yield yourself up to yourself, and quietly to allow yourself to be carried down by the stream; to do this you have occasion for neither effort nor violence: but to return, ah! you must break through inclinations fortified by time; you must hate and resist yourself, tear yourself from the tenderest objects, break asunder the dearest ties, make the most heroic efforts, you who are incapable of the most common ones. Now, I ask, if, in a matter in futurity, or in uncertain events, we ever augur in favour of those who have most obstacles to surmount, and most difficulties to struggle against? Doth not the most easy always appear the most probable? Soften as much as you please this truth in your mind; view it in the most favourable lights; this proposition in regard to your eternal destiny is the most incontestible of Christian morality. It is beyond comparison more certain that I shall never be converted, and that I shall die

in my sin, than that the Lord will have pity upon me, and at last withdraw me from it: this is your situation; and, if you can still be indifferent, and flatter yourself in such a state, your security, my dear hearer, terrifies me.

But I go farther, and I entreat you to listen to me. The sinner who, without labouring to reclaim himself, assures himself of conversion, presumes not only in a state of fearful uncertainty, and where every thing seems to be conclusive against him, but also in spite of the moral certainty, as we are taught by faith, that he is lost. Here are my proofs, *1st*, You expect that God shall convert you; but how do you expect it? By continually placing new obstacles in the way of his grace; by rivetting your chains; by aggravating your yoke; by multiplying your crimes; by neglecting every opportunity of salvation, which his solemnities, his mysteries, and even the terrors of his word offer to you; by always remaining in the same dangers; by changing nothing in your manners, your pleasures, your intimacies, in short, in every thing which continues to nourish, in your heart, that fatal passion from which you hope that grace shall deliver you. How! the foolish virgins are rejected, only for having awaited the bridegroom without fervour; and you, faithless soul, who await him while completing the measure of your crimes, you dare to flatter yourself that you shall be more favourably treated?

2dly, Grace is accorded only to tears, to solicitations, to eager desires; it requires to be long courted. Now, do you pray? At least, do you entreat? Do you imitate the importunity of the widow of the gospel? Do

you labour, like Cornelius the Gentile, to attract that grace by charities and other Christian works? Do you say to the Lord, every day, with the prophet, "Hide "not thy face from me, O Lord, lest I be like unto "them that go down into the pit?" Ah! you say to him, "Lord, I expect that thou wilt draw me to thy- "self; in vain I resist thee; thou wilt, at last, break "asunder my chains; however great be the corruption "of my heart, thou wilt ultimately change it." Fool! what more likely to repel a gift than the temerity which exacts it, and which even in the very moment when most unworthy dares to claim it as a right! Thus we see a fresh argument against you; grace is reserved for the lowly and the fearful, who dread being refused what is not owing to them: it is upon these souls that the Spirit of God relieth, and taketh delight to work wonders; on the contrary, "he despiseth the "presumptuous sinner, and knoweth him afar off."

3*dly*, The grace of conversion which you so confidently expect, is, as you know, the greatest of all gifts. Nevertheless, as you know still better, there is scarcely a sinner more unworthy of it than yourself; unworthy through the nature of your faults, of which you alone know the infamy and the enormity; unworthy from the lights and inspirations you have a thousand times misused; unworthy through the favour of the mysteries and of the truths which you have always neglected; unworthy through the issue even of your natural inclinations, which heaven, at your birth, had formed so happy and so tractable to truth, and which you have turned into melancholy means of vice; unworthy through the iniquitous manner in which you

have derided piety, and those impious desires, so injurious to the truth of God, which have a thousand times led you to wish that all we say of a future state were a fable; lastly, unworthy through that profound security in which you live, which, in the eye of God, is the worst of all your crimes. Now, I ask nothing here but equity; if only a single sinner were to be excluded from that grace of conversion which you expect, you would have every reason to dread lest the exclusion should fall upon you, and you should be that single child of curse, separated as an outcast from his brethren. But, if almost all be deprived of that blessing, ah! my dear hearer, ought you to reckon upon it as secure? And what have you but a superabundance of sins to distinguish you from others? If the hope of the presumptuous sinner perish in general with himself, can you suppose that your salvation shall be accomplished by the same way in which all others perish? I know that we ought never to despair; but humble confidence is very different from presumption. Humble confidence, after having tried all, counts upon nothing; and you depend upon all without having ever tried any thing: humble trust considers the mercy of the Lord only as supplying the defects of penitence, and you make it the refuge of your crimes; humble trust, with fear and trembling, awaits the pardon of those faults it hath lamented, and you coolly expect that those shall be forgiven, of which you never mean to repent. I know, and I again repeat, that we ought never to despair; but, were it possible that despair could be legitimate, ah! it would be when hope is presumptuously encouraged.

But age will mellow the passions, says the sinner to himself; enticing opportunities will not always come in the way; circumstances more favourable for salvation will occur in the course of time; and what is at present impossible, shall one day perhaps be done, when a thousand actual impediments shall be removed. My God! in this manner doth the unfortunate soul deceive himself; and it is through an illusion so palpable that the demon seduces almost all men, the wisest as well as the most foolish, the most enlightened as well as the most credulous, the great as well as the common people. For, my dear hearer, when you promise yourself that one day the Lord will at last have pity upon you, you no doubt promise yourself that he will change your heart; why do you depend upon this change, so necessary to your salvation, more in future than at present? In the first place, will your dispositions for penitence be then more favourable? Will your heart find it easier to break asunder its chains? What! Inclinations deeply rooted through time and years will be more easily eradicated? A torrent which will then have hollowed out its bed, will be more easy to turn aside? Are you in your senses when you say so? Ah! even now it appears so difficult to repress your inordinate passions, though yet in their infancy, and consequently more tractable and easy to regulate! You delay your conversion only because it would cost you too much to conquer yourself on certain points: How! you persuade yourself that it will cost you less in the end; that this fatal plant, then become a tree, will be more pliable; that this wound, inveterate and of longer standing, will be more easy to cure, and

will require less grievous remedies? You expect resources and facilities towards penitence from time; and it is that time, my brethren, which will deprive you of all those yet remaining.

2dly, Shall grace be either more frequent in future, or more victorious? But, granting it even to be so, your usual passions, then more powerful, opposing greater impediments, the grace which would now triumph over your heart, and change you into a thorough penitent, will no longer then, but slightly, agitate you, and excite within you only weak and unavailing desires of penitence. But you have little reason to flatter yourself even with this hope: the more you irritate the goodness of God by delaying your conversion, the more will he withdraw himself from you: every moment diminishes in some measure his favours and his kindness. Recollect that, when you first began to deviate from his ways, not a day passed without his operating within you some movement of salvation, troubles, remorse, and desires of penitence. Now, as you may observe, these inspirations are more rare: it is only on certain occasions that your conscience is aroused; you are partly familiarized with your faults. Ah! my dear hearer, you plainly see that your insensibility will be only increased in the sequel: God will more and more retire from you, and will deliver you up to a reprobate feeling, and to that fatal tranquillity which is the consummation and the most dreadful punishment of iniquity. Now I ask, Are you not absurd in thus marking out, for your conversion, a period in which aids of grace will be more rare, and the dispositions of the heart less docile?

I might still add, that the more you delay, the more you accumulate debts; the more you increase the mass of iniquity, the more crimes shall you have to expiate, the more rigorous shall your reparation be; and, consequently, the more difficult shall be your penitence. Slight austerities, moderate retrenchments, and some Christian charities, would perhaps suffice, at present, to acquit you before your Judge, and to appease his justice. But, in the sequel, when the abundance of your crimes shall have risen beyond your computation, and time and years shall have weakened in your memory, the multitude and the enormity of your iniquities; ah! no reparation on your part can then be sufficiently rigorous, no mortification sufficiently austere, no humiliation sufficiently profound, no pleasure, however innocent, which you must not deny yourself, no gratification which will not be criminal: holy excesses of penitence will be necessary to compensate for the duration and the enormity of your crimes; it will be required of you to quit all, to tear yourself from every thing, to sacrifice your fortune, interests, and comfort, perhaps to condemn yourself to a perpetual exile; for it is only through these means that great sinners are recalled. Now, if slight rigours, which would at present be sufficient amends, appear so insupportable, and disgust you with the idea of a change, will penitence be more alluring, when more toils, and steps a thousand times more bitter, present themselves in its train? My God! upon the affair of salvation alone it is that men are capable of such wilful mistakes. Ah! my brethren, of what avail are great lights, extent of genius, deep penetration, and solid judgment in the management of

earthly matters, and of vain undertakings which shall perish with us, if we are mere children in the grand work of eternity?

And allow me to conclude this part of my discourse with a final reason, which, I trust, will serve to convince you. You consider the vain hope of future conversion as a feeling of grace and of salvation, and as a proof that the Lord visiteth you, and that he hath not yet delivered you up to all the inveteracy of sin. But, my dear hearer, the Lord cannot visit you in his mercy without inspiring you with salutary troubles and fears with regard to your conscience; all the operations of grace begin with these; consequently, while you continue tranquil, it is evident that God treateth you according to all the rigour of his justice, and that he exerciseth upon you the most terrible of his chastisements; I mean to say, his neglect and the denial of his grace. Peace in sin, the security in which you live, is therefore the most infallible mark that God is no longer with you, and that his grace, which in the criminal soul always works trouble and anxiety, dread and distrust, is totally extinguished in yours. Thus you comfort yourself on what ought to excite your most just fears; the most deplorable signs of your reprobation form in your mind the most solid foundation of your hope: confidence while in a state of sin is the most terrible chastisement with which God can punish the sinner, and you draw from it a prejudication of salvation and of penitence. Tremble, if any remains of faith be yet left you; this calm is the forerunner of a shipwreck: you are stamped with the mark of the reprobate; reckon not upon a mercy which treats you so

much the more rigorously, as it permits you to hope and to depend upon it.

The error of the majority of sinners is that of imagining that the grace of conversion is one of those sudden miracles by which the whole face of things is changed in the twinkling of an eye, which plants, tears up, destroys, rears up at the first touch, and in an instant creates the new man, as the earthly man was formerly drawn from nothing. This is the grossest of all mistakes, my dear hearer; conversion is in general a slow and tardy miracle, the fruit of cares, of troubles, of fears, and of bitter anxieties.

The days, saith Jesus Christ, which are to precede the utter destruction of this visible world and the coming of the Son of Man, shall be days of trouble and wo; nations shall rise against nations, and kings against kings; horrible signs shall be seen in the firmament long before the King of Glory himself shall appear; all nature shall announce, by its disorder, its approaching destruction; and the coming of its God. Ah! my dear hearer, behold the image of the change of your heart, of the destruction of that world of passions within you, of the coming of the Son of Man into your soul. Long before that great event, internal wars shall take place; you shall feel your passions excited one against the other; blessed signs of salvation shall be visible in your person; all shall be shaken, all shall be disturbed; all within you shall announce the destruction of the carnal man, the coming of the Son of God, the end of your iniquities, the renovation of your soul, a new heaven and a new earth. Ah! when these blessed things shall come to pass, then lift

up your head, and say that your redemption draweth nigh; then be confident, and adore the awful but consolatory preparations of a God who is on the eve of entering into your heart. But, while nothing is shaken within you, and no change appears in your soul; while your heart faileth not for fear, and your passions, still tranquil, remain undisturbed but by the obstacles which retard their gratification; ah! mistrust those who shall tell you that the Lord draweth nigh; that you will immediately find him in the sanctuary, I mean to say, in the participation of the sacrament, in those retired places to which you shall go perhaps to comfort him in the person of his afflicted members; mistrust those who shall be continually saying, "Lo! here is Christ;" believe them not; they are false prophets, saith Jesus Christ: no sign of his coming hath taken place within you; in vain you expect and presume; it is not in this manner that he will come; trouble and dread walk before him; and the soul who continues tranquil, and confident, shall never be visited by him.

"Happy, therefore, is the man that feareth always:" he whose virtues even do not entirely quiet him upon his eternal destiny, who trembles lest the imperfections mingled with his most laudable works not only destroy their whole merit before God, but even rank them among those which God shall punish on the day of his wrath. But what idea, will some one say to me, do you give us of the God we worship? An idea worthy of him, my brethren; and, in my second part, I shall prove to you, that false trust is injurious to him, and forms to itself the idea of a God, who is neither true, wise, just, nor even merciful.

PART II. It is rather surprising, my brethren, that vain confidence should pretend to find even in religion motives which warrant it, and should mistake the most criminal of all dispositions, for a sentiment of salvation, and a fruit of faith and of grace. In effect, the sinner, who, without wishing to abandon his irregularities, promises himself a change, alleges, in justification of his presumption, *1st*, The power of God, who ruleth over the hearts of men, who can change in an instant the will, and to whom it is equally easy to produce the child of promise from the sterility of old age, as from the fecundity of youth; *2dly*, his justice; for having formed man of clay, that is to say, weak, and with almost unconquerable tendencies to pleasure, he ought to have some consideration for his weakness, and more readily pardon faults which are, as it were, unavoidable to him; *lastly*, his mercy, always ready to receive the repentant sinner. Now, my brethren, it is easy to take from false trust pretexts so unworthy of piety, and to shew that the disposition of the presuming sinner offers an insult to God in all the abovementioned perfections. Allow me to explain my reasons, and continue to honour me with your attention.

In the first place, When you form an idea of a powerful God, master of hearts, and changing at his pleasure the rebellious wills of men, is it not true, that you at the same time conceive a power regulated by wisdom, that is to say, which doth nothing but in conformity with that order it hath established? Now, the presumptuous sinner attributes to God a blind power, which acts indiscriminately. For, though he can do whatever he willeth, nevertheless, as he is infinitely

wise, there is a method in the exercise of his will; he willeth not at random, and whatever he doth hath its eternal reasons in the depth of his divine wisdom. Now, it is evident that this divine wisdom would not be sufficiently justified before men, if the grace of conversion were to be at last accorded to false trust. For, would you say, in order to merit the greatest of all favours, it would then be sufficient to have a thousand times rejected it? The righteous man, who continually crucifies his flesh, who incessantly suffers in order to obtain the precious gift of perseverance, would then have no better claim than the sinner, who, without having ever placed himself in a situation to merit it, hath always promised it to himself? It would then be perfectly indifferent, either to serve the Lord, and to walk uprightly before him, or to pursue the erroneous ways of the passions, since, at last, the lot of each would be the same? How much more, would it then be a misfortune, a folly, a lost trouble, to have carried the yoke from youth, since nothing would be risked by delaying it? The maxims of debauchery, with regard to the love of pleasure in the early stage of life, and to the deferring repentance to the years of decrepitude and debility, would then be the rules of wisdom and of religion? The wonders of grace would then serve but to tempt the fidelity of the just, only to authorize the impenitence of sinners, only to destroy the fruit of the sacrament, and to augment the ills of the church? Is this the God whom we worship? And would he be so wonderful in his gifts, according to the expression of the prophet, if he were to dispense them with so little either of order or of wisdom?

In effect, if the empire which God hath over hearts could serve as a resource for a presumptuous sinner; upon that footing the conversion of all men would be certain, even of those infidels who know not the Lord, of those barbarous nations who have never heard his name. Doth God not rule over the hearts of all men? Who hath ever withstood his will? Is he not able to make his light shine through the most profound darkness, to change into lambs the fiercest lions, and to turn his enemies into the most intrepid confessors of his name? Is the heart of an Indian, or of a savage, a more arduous conquest to him, than that of a presumptuous sinner? Is not every thing alike easy to him? He hath only to say it, and it is done. Yet, nevertheless, would you thereupon be willing that your eternal destiny should run the same hazard as that of a savage, who, in the heart of his forests, almost inaccessible to the preaching of the gospel, worships absurd and monstrous divinities? God may raise up, in his favour, evangelical ministers, who, along with the lights of faith, shall bring grace and salvation to his soul. You say that it requires one of those miraculous efforts of the Almighty power, to overcome all the difficulties which apparently render the conversion of that unfortunate creature impossible; on the contrary, that you, surrounded with the aids of the sacrament, with the light of doctrine and of instruction, are in a situation much more likely to secure your salvation; and consequently, that you have infinitely more ground to promise it to yourself. Ah! my dear hearer, you deceive yourself, and I assure you, that, to me, the salvation of that infidel appears less hopeless than yours.

He has never abused favours which he has never received; you hitherto have unworthily rejected all those which have been offered to you: he has never resisted that truth which he has never known; you iniquitously withstand it. The first impulse of grace will triumph over his heart; and the strongest impressions are ineffectual against the inflexibility of yours. A single ray of light will disclose to him errors and truths till then unknown; while all the lights of faith are unable to disturb the tranquillity of your passions: he offers to the mercy of God only the misfortune of his birth, sins almost involuntary, wretchedness rather than crimes, all of them proper motives to affect him; and you hold out to him affected acts of ingratitude, and of perseverance in obstinacy, all subjects calculated to remove him for ever from you. Ah! it is easy for the Lord to bear upon his wings across the seas apostolical men; his angels, when he pleaseth, know how to transport his prophets from the land in which he is worshipped, even into Babylon, in order to visit a just man exposed to the fury of lions; but if any thing were difficult to him, it would be that of conquering a rebellious heart, of recalling a soul born in the kingdom of light, surrounded with all the succours of faith, penetrated with all the feelings of grace, aided by all the examples of piety, and, nevertheless, always firm in its errors. It is an illusion, therefore, to search in his power for vain motives of security; God could operate as many other prodigies in favour of a thousand sinners whom he forsaketh, although they be not so unworthy as you of his grace; it is a dangerous maxim to judge of his will by his power.

The second error which authorizes false trust, has its foundation in the unjust idea formed of the divine justice. You persuade yourselves, that man being born with violent inclinations for pleasure, your errors are more worthy of the pity, than of the anger of the Lord; and that your weakness alone solicits his favour, instead of arming his indignation against you.

But, in the first place, it might be said to you, that the corruption of your nature comes not from the Creator; that it is the work of man, and the punishment of his sin; that the Lord had created man righteous; and consequently, that this unfortunate tendency, of which you complain, is an irregularity which God must punish, whenever you fall under it; how then can you suppose that it shall serve you as an excuse? It is in consequence of it that you are a child of wrath, and a rejected vessel: how can you pretend to draw reasons from thence, in order to enter into a contest even with God, and to challenge his justice? It is, in a word, in consequence of that that you are unworthy of all favours; how dare you to hold it out as a reason for demanding them?

2*dly*, It might be said to you, that, whatever be the weakness of our will, man is always master of his desires; that he hath been left the charge of his own resolution; that his passions have no more empire over him than what he himself chooses to allow them; and that water, as well as fire, hath been placed before us, in order to allow a perfect freedom of choice to our will. Ah! I could on this point call your own conscience to witness, and ask above all, of you, my dear hearer, if, in spite of your weakness, whenever you have forsaken the law of God, you have not felt that it

wholly depended upon yourself to have continued faithful; if piercing lights have not discovered to you all the horror of your transgression; if secret remorses have not turned you away from it; if you have not then hesitated between pleasure and duty; if, after a thousand internal deliberations, and those secret changes, where at one time grace, and at another cupidity gained the victory, you have not at last declared for guilt, as if still trembling, and almost unable to harden yourself against your conscience? I might go even further, and demand of you, if, considering the happy inclinations towards modesty and reserve, the dispositions with which God had favoured you at your birth, the innocency of virtue would not have been more natural, more pleasing, and more easy to you than the licentiousness of vice; I might ask of you, if you have not suffered more by being unfaithful to your God, than it would have cost you to have been righteous; if you have not been obliged to encroach more upon yourself, to do more violence to your heart, to bear with more vexations, to force your way through more intricate and more arduous paths! Ah! What then can the justice of God find in your dissipations which doth not furnish him fresh matter of severity and anger against you?

Lastly, It might be added, that, if you are born weak, yet the goodness of God hath environed your soul with a thousand aids; that it is that well-beloved vine which he hath fostered with the tenderest care, which he hath fenced with a deep moat, and fortified with an inaccessible tower: I mean to say, that your soul hath been as if defended from its birth by the

succours of the sacrament, by the lights of the doctrine, by the force of examples, by continual inspirations of grace, and, perhaps, by the special aids, likewise, of a holy and a Christian education provided for you by the Lord, and which so many others have wanted. Ingrate! Wherein could you be able to justify your weakness in the presence of the Lord, and to interest his justice itself to use indulgence towards you? Alas! What do your transgressions present to him, but the abuses of his grace, and means of salvation perverted, through the licentiousness of your will, into occasions of sin?

But, let us leave all these reasons; and tell me: is not that weakness of which you complain, and for which you pretend that God will have consideration, your own work, and the fruit of your own special irregularities? Recollect those happy days, when your innocence had not yet been wrecked; were your passions then so difficult to be overcome? Did modesty, temperance, fidelity, piety, then appear to you as impracticable virtues? Did you find it impossible to resist temptation? Was your fondness for pleasure so violent that you were not then your own master? Ah! Whence comes it, then, that your passions now tyrannize with such dominion over your heart? Is it not, that having, through a fatal negligence, allowed them to usurp the command, they have, ever since, been too powerful to be conquered? Have you not forged, with your own hands, these chains? Look around you, and see, if so many righteous, who bear the yoke from their earliest youth, are even tempted in situations in which you are always certain to perish. Why then should

you complain of a weakness which you have brought upon yourself? Why should you imagine, that what must irritate the Lord against you will serve to appease him? What doth he see, in the weakness of your inclinations? He sees the fruit of your crimes, the consequences of a licentious and sensual life: Is it on that ground that you dare to appeal to Justice itself; to that Justice before which the righteous themselves entreat not to be judged? My God! upon what shall the sinner not flatter himself, since, in the most terrible of thy perfections, he finds reason for confidence.

The only rational and legitimate conclusion which it is permitted to you to draw from your own weakness, and from those inclinations for the world, and for pleasures, which, in spite of all your resolutions, hurry you away, is, that you have more occasion to watch, to lament, and to pray, than others; that, with more studious care, you ought to shun the dangers and the attractions of the senses, and of the flesh. But, then it is that you believe yourself invincible, when we exhort you to shun all profane conversations, suspicious intercourses, doubtful pleasures, lascivious spectacles, and assemblies of sin. Ah! You then defend yourself upon the ground, that your innocence is in no degree injured there: You resign to weak souls all the precautions of flight and of circumspection: You tell us that every one must feel and know himself, and that those who are weak enough to be injured there, should, in prudence, keep away from them. But, how can you expect that God will have consideration for a weakness for which you have so little yourself? You are weak when excusing your crimes to him; you are no

longer so, when, upon that ground, it is necessary to adopt painful measures, in order to continue faithful to him.

But, you will say, that, if every thing is to be dreaded from his justice, at least his mercies are infinite; when his goodness should find nothing in us proper to touch him, would it not find motives sufficiently pressing in itself? This would be the third illusion of false trust which I should have to overthrow; but, besides that I have elsewhere sufficiently mentioned it, it is almost time to conclude. I mean, therefore, my dear hearer, to ask you only one question: When you say that the goodness of God is infinite, what do you pretend to say? That he never punishes guilt? You would not dare to say so. That he never abandons the sinner? the Sauls, the Antiochuses, the Pharaohs, have taught you the contrary. That the immodest, the worldly, the revengeful, the ambitious, shall be equally saved with the just? you know that nothing unclean shall enter heaven. That he hath not created man to render him eternally miserable? but wherefore hath he prepared a hell? That he hath already given you a thousand marks of his goodness? but that of itself ought to cover you with shame in regard to the past, and to make you dread every thing for the future. That he is not so terrible as it is said? but nothing is told of his justice but what he hath told you himself. That he would be under the necessity of damning almost all men were all that we say true? but the gospel declares to you, in express terms, that few shall be saved. That he punisheth not but at the worst? but every rejected grace may be the term of his mercies.

That it costs him nothing to forgive? but hath he not the interests of his glory to attend to? That little is required to disarm him? but a change must take place, and the changing of the heart is the greatest of all his works. That the lively trust which you have in his goodness can come only from him? but whatever leads not to him, by leading to repentance, can never come from him. What then do you mean to say? That he will not reject the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart? this, my dear hearer, is what I have throughout been enforcing. Turn to the Lord, and then place your trust in him; whatever your crimes may be, his mercy is always open to the repentant sinner; throw yourself upon his goodness for the durability of your conversion, for perseverance in his service, for victory over the obstacles which the enemy of salvation will continually be throwing in the way of your holy desires; the grace which he giveth, in inspiring the feelings of a sincere penitence, is always a blessed presage of those which are to come: never mistrust his mercy; there is nothing but what may be expected from him, when repentance entreats it; never allow yourself to be cast down by the remembrance of your past iniquities; whatever can be lamented, can be pardoned: lock up in the bosom of his mercy the whole period of time which you have employed in offending him; it will be as though it had never been: from the moment that you shall begin to serve him, you will commence a new birth; a thousand years are only a day in his eyes, from the moment that your crimes are terminated by a sincere change: he is the God of sinners, the Benefactor of the ungrateful, the

Father of prodigal children, the Shepherd of strayed sheep, the Friend of Samaritans; in a word, all the consolations of faith seem to be provided for the repentant sinner.

But, if you continue to promise yourself, that, at last, the time will come when you shall seriously think upon your salvation without yet thinking of it; ah! remember, my dear hearer, that in that very way almost all sinners have perished, and, that it is the high-road to death in sin; remember that the sinner who desires often in vain, is never converted. Even the more you feel within you these unproductive impulses of salvation, depend upon it that the more is your measure filled, and that every rejected grace draws you a degree nearer to hardness of heart: comfort yourself not with desires which hasten your ruin, and which, in all times, have been the lot of the reprobate; and say often to the Lord, with the prophet, How long, O my God! shall I amuse the secret anxieties of my soul with vain projects of penitence? How long shall I see my days flowing rapidly on in promising to my heart, in order to quiet it in its disorders, a sorrow and a repentance which are more and more distant from me? How long shall the enemy, taking advantage of my weakness, employ so gross an error to seduce me? Ah! dissipate this illusion which leads me astray; regard these feeble desires of salvation as the cries of a conscience which cannot be happy without thee; accept these timid beginnings of penitence; favourably attend to them now, O my God! when to me it seems that thy grace renders them more lively and more sincere; and complete, by thy inward operation, what is yet want-

ing to the fulness and to the sincerity of this offer; and make perfect my desires in receiving them, in order that they may be worthy of the reward which thou promisest to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Hear, said the Lord through his prophet, to the unfaithful soul, you who live in ease and in pleasures, and who nevertheless hope in me; sterility and widowhood shall at once burst upon your heads; sterility, that is to say, that you shall no longer be able to bear the fruits of penitence; cultivation and watering shall be in vain; the power of my word, the virtue of my sacraments, the grace of my mysteries, all care shall be unavailing, and you shall no longer be but a withered tree destined for the fire: widowhood, that is to say, I will for ever forsake you; I will leave you single; I will deliver you up to your inclinations, and to the false peace of your passions; I will no longer be your God, your protector, your spouse; I will for ever forsake you.

But shall I here finish my office, my brethren, with the words formerly made use of by Jesus Christ, in finishing his mission to an ungrateful people? You have refused to believe in me, said he to them a few days before his death; you have shut your eyes against the light; you have had ears, yet you heard not: I go, and you shall die in your blindness. If you were still blind, and if you had never known the truth, your sin would be more excusable; but here, you see, I have announced to you the truths which my Father had taught me; and therefore your sin is without excuse: your obstinacy is consummate; you have reject-

ed that salvation which shall be offered to you no more, and the guilt of the truth despised must for ever be upon your head.

Great God! should this then be the price of my toils, and the whole fruit of my ministry? Could the unworthiness of the instrument, which thou hast employed to announce thy word, have destroyed its efficacy, and placed a fatal impediment to the progress of the gospel? No, my dear brethren, the virtue of the word of the cross is not attached to that of the minister who announces it. In the hands of the Lord, clay can give sight to the blind; and, when he pleaseth, the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of the weakest trumpets. I trust then in the Lord for you, my brethren, that having received his word with gladness, as Paul formerly said to the believers of Corinth; that having received it, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, it shall fructify in you; and that, on the awful day of judgment, when an account shall be demanded from me of my ministry, and from you of the fruit which you have reaped from it, I shall be your defence and your justification, and you my glory and my crown. So do I ardently wish it.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE VICES AND VIRTUES OF THE GREAT.

MATTHEW iv. 8.

And the Devil sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

HUMAN prosperity has always been one of the most dangerous snares employed by the devil to entrap men. He knows, that the love of fame and of distinction is so natural to us, that, in general, nothing is considered as too much for their attainment; and that the use of them is so seducing, and so apt to lead astray, that nothing is more rare than piety surrounded with pomp and power.

Nevertheless, my brethren, it is God alone who raiseth up the great and the powerful; who placeth you above the rest, in order to be the fathers of the people,

the comforters of the afflicted, the refuge of the helpless, the supporters of the church, the protectors of virtue, and the models of all believers.

Suffer then, my brethren, that, entering into the spirit of our gospel, I here lay before you the dangers, as well as the advantages of your state; and that I point out to you the obstacles and the facilities which the rank, to which, through providence, you are born, presents to you in the discharge of the duties of a Christian life.

Great temptations, I confess, are attached to your station; but it has likewise as great resources; people of rank are born, it would seem, with more passions than the rest of men; yet have they also the opportunity of practising more virtues: their vices are followed with more consequences; but their piety becomes also more beneficial: in a word, they are much more culpable than the common people, when they forget their God; but they have likewise more merit in remaining faithful to him.

My intention, therefore, at present, is to represent to you the extensive good, or the boundless evils, which always accompany your virtues or vices; to convince you of what importance the elevated rank to which you are born, is towards good, or towards evil; and, lastly, to render an irregular life odious to you, by unfolding the pernicious consequences which your passions drag after them; and piety amiable, through the unutterable benefits which always follow your good examples. It would matter little to point out the dangers of your station, were the advantages of it not likewise to be shown. The Christian pulpit declaims in

general against the grandeurs and glory of the age; but it would be of little avail to be continually dwelling on your complaints, were their remedies not held out to you at the same time. These are the two truths which I mean to unite in this discourse, by laying before you the endless consequences of the vices of the great and powerful, and what inestimable benefits flow from their virtues.

PART I. "A sore trial shall come upon the mighty, "says the Spirit of God; for mercy will soon pardon "the meanest; but mighty men shall be mightily tor- "mented."

It is not, my brethren, because he is mighty himself, that the Lord, as the Scriptures say, rejects the great and the mighty; or that rank and dignity are titles hateful in his eyes, to which his favours are denied, and which, of themselves, constitute our guilt. With the Lord there is no distinction of persons: he is the Lord of the cedars of Lebanon, as well as of the humble hyssop of the valley: he causes his sun to rise over the highest mountains, as well as over the lowest and obscurest places: he hath formed the stars of heaven, as well as the worms which crawl upon the earth: the great are even more natural images of his greatness and glory, the ministers of his authority, the means through which his liberalities and generosity are poured out upon his people. And I come not here, my brethren, in the usual language of the world to pronounce anathemas against human grandeur, and to represent your station as a crime, since that very station comes from God, and that the object in question is not so much to exaggerate the perils of it, as to point out the infinite

opportunities of salvation attached to that rank to which, through the will of Providence, you have been born.

But, I say, that the sins of the great and powerful have two characters of enormity which render them infinitely more punishable before God, than the sins of the commonalty of believers. *1st*, the scandal; *2dly*, the ingratitude.

The scandal. There is no crime to which the gospel affords less hopes of forgiveness, than that of being a stumbling-block to our brethren: "Wo unto the "man," said Jesus Christ, "who shall offend one of "these little ones which believe in me; it were better for "him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and "that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." *1st*, Because you destroy a soul which ought eternally to have enjoyed God. *2dly*, Because you occasion your brother to perish, for whom Jesus Christ had died. *3dly*, Because you become the minister of the devil's designs for the destruction of souls. *4thly*, Because you are that man of sin, that Antichrist, of whom the apostle speaks; for Jesus Christ hath saved man, and you destroy him; Jesus Christ hath raised up true worshippers to his Father, and you deprive him of them; Jesus Christ hath gained us by his blood, and you snatch his conquest from him; Jesus Christ is the physician of souls, and you are their corrupter; he is their road, and you are their snare; he is the shepherd who comes in search of his perishing sheep, and you are the ravenous wolf which slays and destroys those his Father had given him. *5thly*, Because all other sins die, as I may say, with the sinner: but the fruit

of his scandal will be immortal; it will survive his ashes; it will outlive him, and his crimes will not go down with him into the tomb of his fathers.

Achan was punished with so much rigour for having taken only a wedge of gold from among the spoils which were consecrated to the Lord; my God! what then shall be the punishment of him who deprives Jesus Christ of a soul which was his precious spoil, redeemed not with gold and silver, but with all the divine blood of the Lamb without stain? The golden calf was reduced into powder for having occasioned the idolatry of Israel; great God! and could all the splendor which surrounds the great and the powerful shelter them from thy wrath, when their exaltation becomes only a stumbling-block and a source of idolatry to the people? The brazen serpent itself, that sacred monument of God's mercies upon Judah, was broken in pieces for having been an occasion of scandal to the tribes: My God! and the sinner, already so odious through his own crimes, shall be spared when he becomes a snare and a stumbling block to his brethren?

Now, my brethren, such is the first character which always accompanies your sins, you who are exalted over the commonalty of believers by rank or birth: the scandal. The obscure and vulgar live only for themselves. Mingled in the crowd, and concealed by the lowliness of their lot from the eyes of men, God alone is the secret witness of their ways, and the invisible spectator of their errors; if they fall, or if they remain stedfast, it is for the Lord alone, who sees and who judges them; the world, which is unacquainted even with their names, is equally uninstructed by their

examples; their life is without consequence; they may depart from the right path, but they quit it alone; and if they accomplish not their own salvation, their ruin is, at least, confined to themselves, and has no influence over that of their brethren.

But persons of an exalted station are like a public pageant, upon which all eyes are fixed; they are like houses built upon a summit, the solitary situation of which renders them visible from afar; like flaming torches, the splendour of which at once betrays and exposes them to view. Such is the misfortune of greatness and of rank; you no longer live for yourselves alone; to your destruction or to your salvation is attached the destruction or the salvation of almost all those around you; your manners form the manners of the people; your examples are the rules of the multitude; your actions are as well known as your titles; it is impossible for you to err unknown to the public; and the scandal of your faults is always the melancholy privilege of your rank.

I say, the scandal, 1*st*, by imitation. Men always willingly copy after evil, but more especially when held out by great examples; they then find a kind of satisfaction in their errors, because it is through these that they resemble you; the people consider it as giving them an air of consequence to tread in your steps; the city thinks it an honour to adopt all the vices of the court; your manners form a poison which penetrates even into the provinces; which infects all stations, and gives a total change to the public manners; which decks out licentiousness with an air of nobility and spirit, and, in place of the simplicity of our ancient

manners, substitutes the miserable novelty of your pleasures, of your luxury, of your profusions, and of your profane indecencies. Thus from you it is, that obscene fashions, vanity of dress, those artifices which dishonour a visage where modesty alone should be seen, the rage of gaming, freedom of manners, licentiousness of conversations, unbridled passions, and all the corruption of our age, pass to the people.

And from whence, think you, my brethren, comes that unbridled licentiousness which reigns among the people? those who live far from you, in the most distant provinces, still preserve, at least, some remains of their ancient simplicity, and primitive innocence; they live in a happy ignorance of the greater part of those abuses which have now, through your example, become laws. But, the nearer the country approaches the city, the more is the change of manners visible, the more is innocence adulterated, the more abuses are common, and the greatest crime of the people results from an acquaintance with your manners and your customs. After the chiefs of the tribes had entered into the tents of the daughters of Midian, all Judah went aside from the Lord, and few were to be found who had kept free from the general guilt. Great God! how terrible shall one day be the trial of the great and powerful, since, besides their own endless passions, they shall be made accountable to thee for the public irregularities, the depravity of manners, and the corruption of their age; and since even the sins of the people shall become their own.

2dly, By the desire of pleasing. They endeavour to please, by imitating you; your in-

feriors, your creatures, your dependants, consider a resemblance to you as the high road to your favour; they copy your vices, because you hold them out to them as virtues; they enter into your fancies, in order to enter into your confidence; they rival each other in copying, or in surpassing you, because, in your eyes, their greatest merit is in resembling you. Alas! how many weak souls, born with the principles of virtue, and who, far from you, would have nursed only those dispositions favourable to salvation, have had their innocence wrecked through the necessity in which their fortune placed them of imitating you?

3*dly*, By the impunity which you hold out to offenders. You could never reprehend, in your dependants, those abuses and those excesses which you allow to yourself: you are under a necessity of suffering in them what you cannot refuse to yourself: your eyes must be shut upon disorders which are authorized by your own manners; and you are forced to pardon those who resemble you, lest you condemn yourself. A woman of the world, wholly devoted to the art of pleasing, spreads through all her household an air of licentiousness and of worldliness; her house becomes a dangerous rock by which innocence never passes uninjured; every one imitates at home what she displays abroad; and she must pass over those irregularities, because her own manners do not permit her to censure them. What excesses do we not find in those houses kept open and appropriated to everlasting gaming, among that people, as I may call them, of domestics, whom vanity hath multiplied beyond all number! You know the truth of this, my brethren, and the

dignity of the christian pulpit does not forbid me from repeating it here. How dearly do these unfortunate wretches pay for your pleasures, who, out of your sight, and having no check to restrain them, fill up the idle time which your pleasures leave them, in every excess adapted to the meanness of their education and their abject nature, and which they think themselves authorized in doing by your examples! O my God! if he, who neglects his people, be worse, in thy sight, than an infidel, what then is the guilt of him who influences them by his example, and yet is the cause of their finding death and condemnation where they ought to have found the succours of salvation, and the asylum of their innocence?

4*thly*, By necessary employment. How many unfortunate wretches perish, in order to feed your pleasures and your iniquitous passions? for you alone do the dangerous arts subsist: theatres are erected solely for your criminal recreations; profane harmonies every where resound, and corrupt so many hearts, only to flatter the corruption of yours; works, fatal to innocence, are transmitted to posterity solely through the favour of your names and protection. It is you alone, my brethren, who give to the world lascivious poets, pernicious authors, and profane writers: it is to please you that these corrupters of the public manners perfect their talents, and seek their exaltation and fortune in a success, the only end of which is the destruction of souls: it is you alone who protect, reward, and produce them; by honouring them with your familiarity take from them that mark of disgrace and infamy with which they had been stigmatized by the laws of

the church and of the state, and which degraded them in the eyes of men.

Thus it is through you that the people participate in these debaucheries; that this poison infects the cities and provinces; that these public pleasures become the source of public miseries and licentiousness; that so many unfortunate victims renounce their modesty to gratify your pleasures, and, seeking to improve the mediocrity of their fortune by the exercise of talents which your passions alone have rendered useful and pleasing, come upon criminal theatres to represent passions for the gratification of your own; to perish in order to please; to sacrifice their innocence, in depriving of it those who listen to them; to become sources of public danger, and the scandal of religion; to bring misery and dissention even into your families, and to punish you, woman of the world, for the support and the credit which you give them by your presence and your applauses, by becoming the criminal objects of the passion and of the ill-conduct of your children, and perhaps dividing with yourself the heart of your husband, and completely ruining his affairs and fortune.

5thly, By its duration. Not merely, my brethren, is the corruption of our age almost wholly the work of the great and powerful; ages to come will likewise be indebted to you, perhaps, for a part of their licentiousness and excesses. These profane poems, which have seen the light solely through your means, will still corrupt hearts in future ages: those dangerous authors, whom you honour with your protection, will pass into the hands of your posterity; and your crimes

will be multiplied with that dangerous venom which they contain, and which will be communicated from age to age. Even your passions, immortalized in history, after having been a scandal in your own time, will also be held up to view in succeeding ages: the reading of your errors, handed down to posterity, will raise up imitators after your death: instructions in guilt will be sought for in the narrative of your adventures; and your excesses shall not expire with you. The voluptuousness of Solomon still furnishes blasphemies and derisions to the impious, and motives of confidence to libertinism; the infamous passion of Potiphar's wife hath been preserved down to us, and her rank hath immortalized her weakness. Such is the destiny of the vices and of the passions of the great and powerful: they do not live for their own age alone; they live for ages to come, and the duration of their scandal hath no other limits than that of their name.

You know this to be a truth, my brethren. Do we not still read, with new danger, those scandalous memoirs composed in the age of our fathers, which have transmitted down to us the excesses of preceding courts, and immortalized the passions of the principal persons who figured in them? The irregularities of obscure people, and of the rest of mankind who then lived, remain sunk in oblivion; their passions terminated with them; their vices, obscure as their names, have escaped history; and, with regard to us, they are as though they had never been: while the errors of those who are distinguished in their age by their rank and birth, are all that now remain to us of those

past times. Their passions continually inflame new ones, even at this day, through the simplicity of style and licentiousness of the authors who hand them down to us ; and the sole privilege of their condition is, that, while the vices of the lower orders of people sink with themselves, those of the great and the powerful spring up again, as I may say, from their ashes, pass from age to age, are engraven on the public monuments, and are never blotted out from the memory of men. What enormous crimes, great God ! which are thus the scandal of all ages, the rock of all stations, and which, even to the end, shall serve as an excitement to vice, as a pretext to the sinner, and as a lasting model of debauchery and licentiousness !

Lastly, By seduction. Your examples in honouring vice, render virtue contemptible ; the Christian life becomes so ridiculous, that those who profess it are almost ashamed of it before you ; the exterior of piety has an ungracious and awkward appearance, which is concealed in your presence, as if it were a deformity which dishonours the mind. How many souls, touched by God, only resist his grace and his Spirit through the dread of forfeiting that portion of your confidence which a long fellowship in pleasures hath given to them ! How many souls, disgusted with the world, have not the courage to declare themselves, and return to God, lest they expose themselves to your senseless derisions ; still continue to copy your manners, upon which they have been fully undeceived by grace; and, through an unrighteous complaisance and respect for your rank, take a thousand steps from which their new faith as well as their own inclination are equally distant !

I speak not of the prejudices which you perpetuate in the world against virtue; of those lamentable discourses against the godly, which your authority confirms; which pass from you to the people, and maintain, in all stations, those ancient prepossessions against piety, and those continual derisions of the righteous, which deprive virtue of all its dignity, and harden sinners in vice.

And from thence, my brethren, how many righteous are there not seduced! How many weak led astray! How many wavering souls retained in sin! How many impious and libertine souls strengthened! What an obstacle do you become to the fruit of our ministry! How many hearts, already prepared, oppose to the force of the truth which we announce, only the long engagements which bind them to your manners and to your pleasures, and find within themselves only you who serve as a wall and a buckler against grace! My God! what a scourge for the age, what a misfortune for the people, is a nobleman of this world, who lives not in the fear of thee, who knows thee not, and who acts in contempt of thy laws and eternal ordinances! It is a present which thou sendest to men in thy wrath, and the most dreadful mark of thine indignation upon cities and upon kingdoms.

Yes, my brethren, behold what you are when you belong not to God. Such is the first character of your faults, the scandal. Your lot decides in general that of the people: the excesses of the lower ranks are always the consequence of your excesses; and the transgressions of Jacob, said the prophet, that is to say, of the people and of the tribes, came only from Samaria, the seat of the great and of the mighty.

But, even granting that no new degree of enormity should be attached to the great by the scandal inseparable from their sins, ingratitude, which forms the second character of them, would be amply sufficient to draw upon their heads, that neglect of God by which his bowels are for ever shut to compassion and clemency.

I say, ingratitude: for God hath preferred you over so many unfortunate fellow-creatures who languish in obscurity and in want; he hath exalted you, and hath caused you to be born amid splendour and abundance; he hath chosen you above all the people to load you with benefits; in you alone he hath assembled riches, honours, titles, distinctions, and all the advantages of the earth; it would seem that his providence watches only for you, while so many unfortunate millions eat the bread of tribulation and of sorrow; the earth seems to be produced for you alone; the sun to rise and to go down solely for you; even the rest of mankind seem born only for you, and to contribute to your grandeur and purposes; it would appear that the Lord is occupied solely with you, while he neglecteth so many obscure souls whose days are days of sorrow and want, and for whom it would seem that there is no God upon the earth; yet, nevertheless, you turn against God all that you have received from his hands; your abundance serves for the indulgence of your passions; your exaltation facilitates your criminal pleasures; and his blessings become your crimes.

Yes, my brethren, while thousands of unfortunate fellow-creatures, upon whom his hand is so heavy; while an obscure populace, for whom life has nothing

but hardships and toil, invoke and bless him, raise up their hands to him in the simplicity of their hearts, regard him as their father, and give him every mark of an unaffected piety, and of a sincere religion: you, whom he loads with his benefits; you, for whom the entire world seems to be made, you acknowledge him not; you deign not to lift up your eyes to him; you never bestow even a moment's reflection whether there be or be not a God above you who interferes in the things of the earth; in place of thanksgivings, you return him insults, and regard religion as only for the people.

Alas! you think it mean and ungenerous when those, whose advancement was your work, neglect you, deny their obligations, and even employ that credit, which they owe solely to you, in thwarting and in ruining you. But, my brethren, they only act by you as you do towards your God. Is not your exaltation his work? Is it not his hand alone which hath separated your ancestors from the crowd, and hath placed them at the head of the people? Is it not through his providence alone that you are born of an illustrious blood, and that you enjoy, from your birth, what a whole life of care and of toil could never have afforded you reason to expect? What had you in his eyes more than so many unfortunate fellow-creatures whom he leaveth in want? Ah! if he had paid regard only to the natural qualities of the soul, to probity, honesty, modesty, innocence; how many obscure souls, born with all these virtues, might have been preferred, and would now have been occupying your place? If he had consulted only the use which you were one day to make of his benefits; how many unfortunate souls, had they

been placed in your situation, would have been an example to the people, the protectors of virtue, and in their abundance would have glorified God, they who even in their indigence invoke and bless him; while you, on the contrary, are the cause of his name being blasphemed, and your example becomes a source of seduction for his people?

He chooseth you, however, and rejecteth them; he humbleth them and exalteth you; for them he is an hard and severe master, and for you a liberal and bountiful father. What more could he have done to engage you to serve and to be faithful to him? What more powerful attraction, or more likely to secure the homage of hearts than benefits? "Thine, O Lord," said David at the height of all his prosperity, "is the great-"ness, and the power, and the glory: both riches and "honour come from thee; and in thine hand it is to "make great, and to give strength unto all. It is just, "then, O my God, to glorify thee in thy gifts; to "measure what I owe thee upon what thou hast done "for me, and to render mine exaltation, my greatness, "and all that I am, subservient to thy glory."

Yet, nevertheless, my brethren, the more he hath done for you, the more do you raise yourselves up against him. It is the rich and the powerful who live without any other God in this world, than their iniquitous pleasures. It is you alone who deny the slightest homage to him; who believe yourselves to be relieved from whatever is irksome or severe in his law; who fancy yourselves born for the sole purpose of enjoying yourselves, of applying his benefits to the gratification of your passions, and who remit to the vulgar the care

of serving him, of returning him thanks, and of religiously observing the ordinances of his holy law.

Thus, it often happens that the people worship, and you insult him; the people appease, and you provoke him; the people invoke, and you neglect him; the people zealously serve him, and you look down upon his servants; the people are continually raising up their hands to him, and you doubt whether he even exists, you who alone feel the effects of his liberality, and of his power; his chastisements form worshippers for him, and his benefits are followed with only derision and insult.

I say, his benefits: For, with regard to you, he hath not confined them to the mere external advantages of fortune. He hath likewise created you with more favourable dispositions to virtue than the lower orders; a heart more noble, and more exalted; happier inclinations; sentiments more worthy of the grandeur of faith; more understanding, elevation of mind, knowledge, instruction, and relish for good. You have received from nature, milder passions, more cultivated manners, and all the other incidental advantages of high birth; that politeness which softens the temper; that dignity which restrains the sallies of the disposition; that humanity which renders you more open to the impressions of grace. How many benefits do you then abuse, when you live not according to God! What a monster of ingratitude is a man of high rank, loaded with honours and prosperity, who never lifts up his eyes to heaven to worship the hand which bestows them!

And whence, think you, come the public calamities, the scourges with which cities and provinces are afflict-

ed? It is only as a punishment for your iniquitous abuse of abundance, that God sometimes striketh the land with barrenness. His justice, indignant at the manner in which you have turned his own benefits against himself, withdraws them from your passions; curses the land; permits wars and dissentions; crumbles your fortunes into dust; extinguishes your families; withers the root of your posterity; makes your titles and possessions to pass into the hands of strangers; and holds you out as striking examples of the inconstancy of human affairs, and as monuments of his wrath against hearts equally ungrateful and insensible to the paternal cares of his providence.

Such, my brethren, are the two characters inseparable from your sins; the scandal and the ingratitude of them: behold what you are when you depart from God; and what you have never perhaps paid attention to. From the moment that you are guilty, you cannot be trivially so. The passions are the same with the low and with the powerful; but very different is the guilt; and a single one of your crimes often leads to more miseries, and hath, before God, more extended and more terrible consequences, than a whole life of iniquity in an obscure and vulgar soul. But your virtues have also the same advantage and the same destiny; and this is what remains for me to prove, in the last part of this discourse.

PART II. If scandal and ingratitude be the inseparable consequences of the vices and passions of persons of high rank, their virtues have also two particular characters, which render them far more acceptable to

God than those of common believers: first, the example; secondly, the authority. And this, my brethren, is a truth highly consoling to you, who are placed by providence in an exalted station, and well calculated to animate you to serve God, and to render virtue lovely to you. For it is a mistake to consider the rank to which you are born as an obstacle to salvation, and to the duties imposed upon us by religion. The rocks are more dangerous there, I confess, than in an obscure lot, the temptations stronger and more frequent; and, while pointing out the advantages, with regard to salvation, of high rank, I do not pretend to conceal those dangers which Jesus Christ himself hath pointed out to us in the gospel, as being attached to it.

I wish only to establish this truth, that you may do more for God than the lower orders; that infinitely more advantages accrue to religion from the piety of a single person of distinction, than from that of almost a whole people of believers: and that in proportion to your culpability in neglecting God, will be the glory that will accrue to him from your fidelity, and the consequence of your virtues upon believers.

The first is the example. Among the people, one who fears God, glorifies him only in his own heart: he is a child of light, who walks, as I may say, amid darkness: he pays his own homage, but he attracts no others to him: shut up in the obscurity of his fortune, he lives under the eye of God alone: he wishes that his name should be glorified, and, by these desires, he renders him that glory which he cannot do by his example: his virtues tend to his own salvation; but they lead not to the salvation of his brethren: he is here

below as a treasure hidden in the earth, which the vineyard of Jesus Christ beareth unwittingly, and of which he maketh no use.

But you, my brethren, who live exposed to the view of the public, whose eyes are always upon you, your virtuous examples become equally shining as your names: you spread the good savour of Jesus Christ wherever that of your rank and titles is spread: you make the name of the Lord glorified wherever your own is known: the same elevation which makes you known upon the earth, likewise informs all men what you do for heaven: the wonders of grace are every where seen in your natural advantages: the people, the city, the country, all who are continually hearing your names repeated, feel, awakened at the same time, that idea of virtue which your examples have attached to them. You make piety honoured in the opinion of the public: you preach it to those whom you know not: you become, says the prophet, like a signal of virtue raised up amid the people: a whole kingdom has its eyes upon you, and speaks of your examples, and even abroad your piety becomes equally known as your birth.

Now, with what attractions is not virtue invested in the eyes of the people by this eclat! In the first place, great models are more striking; and, when countenanced by the great, piety becomes as it were fashionable with the people. *2dly*, That idea of weakness commonly attached to virtue, is dissipated from the moment that you ennoble it, as I may say, with your names, and that examples can be produced in honour of it. *3dly*, The rest of mankind no longer blush at

modesty and frugality, when they see, in your instance, that modesty is perfectly compatible with greatness; and that to shun luxury and profusion is so far from being a subject of shame to any rank whatever, that, on the contrary, it adds lustre and dignity to the highest rank and birth. *4thly*, How many weak souls, who would blush at virtue, are confirmed by your example, are no longer afraid of acting as you act, and even pride themselves in following your steps! *5thly*, How many souls, still much too attached to worldly interests, would dread lest piety should be an obstacle to their advancement, and perhaps find, in this temptation, an effectual bar to all their penitential desires, if they were not taught, in seeing you, that piety is useful to all, and that, while attracting the favours of Heaven, they do not prevent those of earth! *6thly*, Your inferiors, your dependants, and all who look up to you, view virtue in a much more amiable light, since it is become a certain way of pleasing you, and since their progress, in your confidence and esteem, depends upon their progress in piety.

Lastly, How much is religion exalted, when, in your persons, she proves that she is still capable of existing among those who despise honours, dignities, and riches; who live amidst prosperity without being dazzled by it; who enjoy the highest rank, without losing sight of eternal riches; who possess all, as though possessing nothing; who are greater than the whole world, and yet consider as dirt all the advantages of the earth, whenever they become an obstacle to the promises which faith shews them in heaven! How are the wicked confounded to see you treading the paths of salva-

tion amidst every human prosperity; to find that virtue is not the resource of despair; that they vainly endeavour to persuade themselves, that recourse is had to God only when forsaken by the world, since you fail not, though loaded with all the favours of the world, to love the opprobrium of Jesus Christ! What consolation, even for our ministry, to be enabled to employ your examples in these Christian pulpits, in overthrowing sinners of a more obscure lot; to cite your virtues in order to make them blush at their vices; to cover with shame all their vain excuses, by proving your fidelity to the law of God; that their dangers are not greater than yours; that the objects of their passions are less seductive; that more charms, and more illusions, are not held out by the world to them than to you; that if grace can raise up faithful hearts even in the palaces of kings, it must be equally able to form them under the roof of the citizen, and of the magistrate, and, consequently, that salvation is open to all, and that our station becomes a favourable pretext to our passions, only when the corruption of our hearts is the true reason which authorizes them.

Yes, my brethren, I repeat, that, in serving God, you give a new force to our ministry; more weight to the truths announced by us to the people; more confidence to our zeal; more dignity to the word of Jesus Christ; more credit to our censures; more consolation to our toils; and, in observing your conduct, the world is convinced of truths which it had before disputed. What benefits then accrue from your examples! You exalt piety, and honour religion in the minds of the people; you animate the righteous of every station; you console the servants

of God; you spread throughout a whole kingdom a sanctity that overthrows vice and countenances virtue; you support the rules of the gospel against the maxims of the world; you are cited in the cities and in the most distant provinces to encourage the weak, and to aggrandize the kingdom of Jesus Christ; fathers teach your names to their children, to animate them to virtue; and, without knowing it, you become the model of the people, the conversation of the lower orders, the edification of families, the example of every station and of every class. Scarcely had the heads of the tribes in the desert, and the most distinguished women, brought to Moses their most precious ornaments for the construction of the tabernacle, when all the people, incited by their example, presented themselves in crowds to offer their gifts and their presents; and Moses was even under the necessity of placing bounds to their pious alacrity, and of moderating the excess of their liberalities.

Ah! my brethren, what good, I repeat, may not your example alone do among the people! Public dissipation discredited from the moment that you cease to countenance it; indecent fashions proscribed whenever you neglect them; dangerous customs antiquated as soon as you forsake them; the source of almost all disorders dried up from the moment that you live according to God. And how many souls thereby saved! What evils prevented! What crimes checked! What misfortunes hindered! How much does religion gain in a single person of rank, who lives according to faith! What a present doth God make to the earth, to a kingdom, to a people, when he bestoweth a nobility who

live in his fear! And, should the interest even of your own souls be insufficient to render virtue pleasing to you, should not the interest of so many souls, to whom, by living according to God, you are an occasion of salvation, induce you to prefer the fear and the love of his law to all the vain pleasures of the earth? Is the heart capable of tasting a more exquisite pleasure than that of being a source of salvation and of blessing to our brethren?

And what is yet more fortunate for you, is, that you do not live for your own age alone: I have already observed that your example will pass to succeeding ages: the virtues of inferior believers perish, as I may say, with them; but your virtues will be recorded in history with your names. You will become a pious model for your posterity, equally as you have been so for the people of your own times; connected, through your rank and your employments, with the principal events of our age, you will be transmitted with them to the ages to come. Succeeding courts will still find the history of your piety and of your manners blended with the public history of our days; you will do credit to piety even in the ages to come; the memory of your virtues, preserved in our annals, will still serve as an instruction to those of your descendants who shall read them; and it shall one day be said of you, as of those men full of glory and of righteousness, mentioned by scripture, that your piety hath not finished with you; that your bodies, indeed, are buried in peace, but that your name liveth for evermore; that your seed standeth for ever, and that your name shall not be blotted out.

Nor is this all: the force of example renders your virtues a public good, which is their first character;

but authority, which is their second, finishes and sustains the endless good which your examples have begun. And, in speaking of the authority, alas! I cannot unfold all the fruitful consequences of the piety of the great, which this idea excites in my mind.

1st, The protection of virtue. Timid virtue is often oppressed, because it wants either boldness to shew, or protection to defend itself: obscure virtue is often despised, because nothing exalts it to the eyes of the senses, and the world is delighted to turn into a crime against piety the obscurity of those who practise it. But no sooner do you adopt its cause, than virtue no longer wants protection; you become the interpreters of the godly with the prince, and the channels by which they find continual access to the throne; you bring righteous characters into office, who become public examples; you bring to light servants of God, men of learning and of virtue, who would have remained in the dust, and who, through favour of your support, appear in public, employ their talents, contribute to the edification of believers, to the instruction of the people, to the consummation of the holy, teach the rules of virtue to those who know them not, will teach them to our descendants, and will hand down to all ages to come, with the pious monuments of their own zeal, the immortal fruits of your love for the righteous, and of that protection with which you have honoured virtue.

What shall I say? You strengthen the zeal of the godly in holy undertakings; and your protection animates and enables them to conquer all the obstacles which the demon constantly throws in the way of those works which are to glorify God, and to contribute to

the salvation of souls. What noble foundations and pious designs, now carried into execution, would have failed, if the authority of a righteous man in office had not removed the impediments which rendered their accomplishment apparently impossible!

What more shall I say? By your example you render virtue respectable to those who love it not, and they are no longer ashamed of being a Christian from the moment that they therein resemble you. You divest impiety of that air of confidence and of ostentation with which it dares to shew itself, and free-thinking ceases to be fashionable as soon as you declare against it. You maintain the religion of our fathers among the people; you preserve faith to succeeding ages; and it often requires only a single person of rank in a kingdom, firm in faith, to stop the progress of error and innovation, and to preserve to a whole people the faith of their ancestors. Esther alone saved the people and the law of God in a great empire; Matthias individually stood out against foreign altars, and prevented superstition from prevailing in the midst of Judah. Oh! my brethren, how really great do you appear when you belong to Jesus Christ! And with how much superior lustre and dignity do your rank and your birth shine in the vast fruits of your piety, than in the luxury of your passions, and in all the vain pomp of human magnificence!

2ndly, The rewards of virtue. You render it honourable by giving it that preference which is its due, in the choice of places dependant upon you, and in entrusting with employments only those whose piety entitles them to the public confidence; by placing depen-

dence upon the fidelity of your inferiors only in proportion as they are faithful to God, and, seeking chiefly in men, for rectitude of heart and purity of morals, without which all other talents possess only an equivocal merit, either injurious to themselves, or useless to the public.

And from thence, how much advantage arises to the public! What happiness will not a kingdom possess in which the godly occupy the first places; where employments are the rewards of virtue; where the public affairs are entrusted only to those who have more the public interest in view than their own, and who consider as nothing the gain of the whole world if they thereby lose their soul!

What a blessing for the people when they find their fathers in their judges; the protectors of their weakness in the arbiters of their lot; the consolers of their sufferings in the interpreters of their interests! What abuses prevented! What tears wiped away! What crimes avoided! What harmony in families! What consolation for the unfortunate! What a compliment even to virtue, when the people are rejoiced to see it in office, and when the world, all worldly as it is, is, however, well pleased to have the godly for its defenders and judges! What an attraction to virtue, when it is seen to have the promise, not only of the life that now is, but of that also which is to come.

And say not, my brethren, that, in rewarding virtue, sinners are not corrected, but only hypocrites multiplied. I know how far men may be carried by a thirst of advancement, and what abuses they are capable of making of religion in order to accomplish their ends: but,

at least, you force vice to hide itself; you divest it of that notoriety and security which spread and communicate it; you preserve the externals of religion among the people; you multiply the examples of piety among believers, and if licentiousness be not in reality diminished, at least the scandal of it is more rare!

Lastly, The holy benefactions of virtue. But I feel that my subject leads me away, and it is time to conclude. Yes, my brethren, what an additional fund of comfort for the community in the Christian and charitable use of your riches: You shelter innocence; you open asylums of penitence for guilt; you render virtue lovely to the unfortunate by the resources which they find in yours; you secure to husbands the fidelity of their wives; to fathers the salvation of their children; to pastors the safety of their flock; peace to families, comfort to the afflicted, innocence to the deserted widow, succour to the orphan, good order to the public, and to all the support of their virtue, or the cure of their vices.

And here, my brethren, conceive if you can the wide extended fruits of your virtue, and the inexplicable advantages accruing from it to the church. What scandal avoided! What crimes prevented! What public evils checked! how many weak preserved! How many righteous sustained! How many sinners recalled! How many souls withdrawn from the precipice! How much you contribute to the aggrandizement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, to the honour of religion, to the consummation of the holy, and to the salvation of all believers! How many of the chosen of every tongue and of every tribe shall one day in heaven

place at your feet their crown of immortality, as if publicly to acknowledge that they are indebted for it to you! What consolation to be able to say to yourselves, that, in serving God, you will attract other servants to him, and that your piety becomes a source of blessing for the people! No, my brethren, if there be any thing flattering in rank, it is not those vain distinctions attached to it by custom; it is the power of becoming, by serving God, the source of public good, the support of religion, the consolation of the church, and the chief instruments employed by God for the accomplishment of his merciful designs upon them.

What then do you not lose when you live not according to God! What do we ourselves not lose when you are wanting to us! Of how many advantages do you deprive believers! Of what consolations do you not deprive yourselves! What joy in heaven for the conversion of one sinner elevated in rank! How highly criminal when you live not according to God! You can neither be saved nor condemned alone. You resemble either that dragon of the Revelation, who, being cast out from heaven into the earth, drags after him in his fall so many of the stars; or that mysterious serpent spoken of by Jesus Christ, who, being exalted upon the earth, yet attracts all after him. You are established for the ruin or for the salvation of many; public scourges or public comforts. May you, my brethren, know your true interests; may you feel what you are in the designs of God, how much you have it in your power to do for his glory, how much he expecteth of you, how much the church, and even we ourselves, expect of you!

Ah! my brethren, you have an exalted idea of your rank and of your stations with regard to the world! But, permit me to tell you: You are yet unacquainted with all your greatness; you see but the humblest part of what you are; you are still greater with regard to piety; and the privileges of your virtue are much more illustrious and more marked than those of your titles. May you, my brethren, fulfil your destiny! And thou, O my God! touch, during these days of salvation, the great and the powerful, by the force of that truth with which thou fillest our mouths; draw to thyself those hearts upon whose conquest depends that of the rest of believers; have compassion upon thy people, by sanctifying those whom thy providence hath placed at their head; save Israel, in saving those who rule it; give to thy church great examples, who may perpetuate virtue from age to age, and who may assist, even to the end, in forming that immortal assembly of righteous which shall bless thy name for ever and ever.

SERMON XX.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF THE WORLD TOWARDS THE GODLY.

JOHN IX. 24.

Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner.

WHAT can be expected by the purest and most irreproachable virtue from the injustice of the world, seeing it hath formerly found subjects of scandal and censure in the sanctity even of Jesus Christ? If, in the sight of the Jews, he work wonderful miracles, if, on the occasion recorded in the text, he restore sight to the blind, they accuse him of being a Sabbath-breaker, of working miracles through Beelzebub rather than in the name of the Lord, and of only wishing, through these impostures, to overturn and to destroy the law of Moses; that is to say, they attack his intentions, in order to render his deeds suspicious and criminal.

If he honour with his presence the table of the Pharisees, that he may have an opportunity of recalling and instructing them, he is looked upon as a sinner, and as a lover of good cheer: that is to say, they make his deeds criminal when they find it inconvenient to search into the integrity of his intentions.

Again, If he appear in the temple, armed with zeal and severity, to avenge the profanations which disgrace that holy place, the zeal with which he is inflamed for the glory of his Father appears now to them, an unjust usurpation of an authority which belongs not to him: that is to say, they exercise themselves in vague and unfounded reproaches, when they have nothing to allege against his intentions, or his works.

I am obliged, my brethren, sorrowfully to confess that the piety of the godly doth not, at present, experience more indulgence among us, than the sanctity of Jesus Christ formerly met with in Judea. The pious are become objects of censure and derision to the public; and, in an age, when dissipation is become so general, when scandalous excesses of every kind furnish ample matter to the malignity of conversation and censure, every thing finds favour but virtue and innocence.

Yes, my brethren, if the conduct of the godly appear irreproachable, and furnish no materials for censure, you fix yourselves on their intentions which appear not; you accuse them of labouring towards their own purposes, and of having their own separate views and designs.

If their virtue seem to draw nearer to an equality with our own, and sometimes abate from its severity, in order to attach us to God, by an ostensible confor-

mity to our manners and customs, you make their most innocent amusements and recreations appear criminal, without troubling yourselves about their intentions.

Again, If their virtue, inspired by a divine flame, no longer keep measures with the world, and leave nothing to be alleged against either their intentions or their acts; you then employ yourselves in vague discourses, and unfounded reproaches against even their zeal and piety.

Now, suffer me, my brethren, for once, to stand up against an abuse so disgraceful to religion, so injurious to that Being who forms the holy, so scandalous among Christians, so likely to draw down upon us those lasting curses, which formerly turned the inheritance of the Lord into a deserted and forsaken land, and so worthy of the zeal of our ministry.

You attack the intentions, when you have nothing to say against the works of the godly: this is an act at least of temerity. You exaggerate their weaknesses, and make their slightest imperfections appear criminal: this is inhuman. You turn even their zeal and fervour into ridicule: this is impious. Behold, my brethren, the three descriptions of injustice committed by the world towards the pious. That rash species of injustice which always suspects their intentions: The injustice of inhumanity, which gives no palliation to the slightest imperfections: The injustice of impiety, which, of their zeal and sanctity, makes a subject of contempt and derision. May these truths, O my God! obtain for virtue that honour and glory which are due to it, and force the world itself to respect pious characters, whom it is unworthy to possess!

PART I. Nothing is more sublime, or more worthy of veneration on earth, than genuine virtue: the world itself is forced to acknowledge this truth. Elevation of sentiment, nobility of motive, a command over the passions, patience under adversity, gentleness under injuries, contempt of one's self under praise, courage under difficulties, austerity in pleasures, fidelity in duties, equality of temper in all the events of life, in a word, all that philosophy hath conceived of its imaginary sage, find their reality only in the disciple of the gospel. The more even our manners are corrupted, the more the age is dissolute, the more doth a just soul, who, in the midst of the general corruption, knows how to preserve its righteousness and innocence, merit the public admiration; and, if the pagans themselves so highly respected Christians, in a time when all Christians were holy, with much greater reason are those Christians, who remain faithful, worthy of our veneration and respect, at a period, when sanctity is become so rare among believers.

It is therefore a melancholy circumstance for our ministry, that the corruption of manners should oblige us now to do what the first defenders of faith formerly did with so much dignity before the Pagan tribunals; that is to say, to apologize for the servants of Jesus Christ; and that it should be necessary to teach Christians to honour those who profess themselves such: yet nothing is more necessary; and the most prevalent language of the world seems to be that of censure and derision of piety. I confess that the world appears to respect virtue in the abstract; but it always despises those who make a profession of it: it acknowledges

that nothing is more estimable than a solid and sincere piety; but it complains that such is no where to be found; and, by always separating virtue from those who practise it, it only makes a shew of respecting the phantom of sanctity and righteousness, that it may be the better entitled to contemn and to censure the just.

Now the first object, to which the ordinary discourses of the world against virtue are directed, is the probity of the intentions of the just. As what is apparent in their actions gives little hold in general to malignity and censure, they confine themselves to the intention: they pretend above all at this period, when under a prince equally great as religious, virtue formerly a stranger, and dreaded at court, is now become the surest path to favour and reward; they pretend that it is that path to which all, who make a public profession of it, point their aim: that their only wish is to accomplish their ends; and that those, who appear the most sanctified and disinterested, are superior to the rest only in art and cunning: if they excuse them from the meanness of such a motive, they give them others equally unworthy of the elevation of virtue and of Christian sincerity. Thus when a soul, touched for its errors, becomes contrite; it is not God, but the world whom it seeks through a more cunning and concealed path; it is not grace which hath changed the heart, it is age which begins to efface its attractions, and to withdraw it from pleasures, only because pleasures begin to fly from it. If zeal display itself in works of piety; it is not that they are charitable, it is because they wish to acquire the reputation of liberality: If they shut themselves up in solitude and in prayer, it is not from

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a piety which dreads the dangers of the world, it is from a singularity and ostentation by which they hope to attract its suffrages: *Lastly*, the merit of the most holy and the most virtuous actions is always disparaged in the mouth of the wordly, by the suspicions with which they endeavour to blacken the intention.

Now, in this temerity, there are three odious points, which expose the absurdity and the injustice of it: It is indiscreet because you judge, and decide upon what you know not: It is corrupt, because we generally suppose in others only what we feel in ourselves: *Lastly*, it is contradictory to itself because the same suspicions which appear to you so well founded when entertained of others, seem equally unjust and foolish when directed towards yourself. Follow, I beseech you, the developement of these truths.

I say, in the first place, it displays great indiscretion. For, my brethren, to God alone is reserved the judgment of intentions and thoughts: He alone who sees to the bottom of our hearts, can judge them; nor will they be manifested till that terrible day, when his light shall shine through and dispel the darkness. An impenetrable veil is spread here below, over the depth of the human heart; we must then wait till that veil shall be rent, before the shameful passion which it conceals, as the apostle says, can become manifest, and before the mystery of iniquity, which worketh in secret, can be revealed: till then, whatever passes in the heart of men, buried from our knowledge, is interdicted to our rash judgments: even when what we see in the conduct of our brethren appears unfavourable to them, charity obliges us to suppose that what we see not,

makes amends for, and rectifies it; and it requires us to excuse the faults of the actions which offend us, by the innocency of the intentions which are concealed from our knowledge. Now, if religion ought to render us indulgent, and even favourable to their vices, will it suffer us to be cruel and inexorable to their virtues?

Indeed, my brethren, what renders your temerity more unjust, more black, and more cruel, is the nature of your suspicions. For, did you suspect the pious only of some of the foibles inseparable from human nature; of too much sensibility to injury, for instance, too much attention to their interests, too much inflexibility in their opinions; we should be entitled to reply to you, as we shall afterwards tell you, that you exact from the virtuous an exemption from error, and a degree of perfection which exists not in life. But you rest not there; you attack their probity and integrity of heart; you suspect them of foul crimes, dissimulation, and hypocrisy; of making the most holy things subservient to their own views and passions; of being public impostors; of sporting with God and man; and all these from the inostensible appearances of virtue. What, my brethren! You would not dare, after the most notorious guilt, to pronounce such a sentence on a convicted criminal; you would rather consider his fault as one of those misfortunes which may happen to all men, and of which an evil moment may render us capable; and you pronounce it nevertheless against the virtuous; you suspect in a pious character, from an holy and praiseworthy life, what you would not dare to suspect from the most scandalous and criminal conduct of a sinner?

You consider that as a witticism, when directed against the servants of God, which would appear to you as an act of barbarity when against a man stained with a thousand crimes. Is virtue then the only crime unworthy of indulgence; or is it sufficient, to serve Jesus Christ, to become unworthy of all respect? Do the holy practices of piety, which surely ought rather to attract respect and esteem to your brother, become the only titles which confound, him in your mind, with the infamous and the wicked?

I allow that the hypocrite deserves the execration of both God and man; that the abuse which he makes of religion, is the greatest of crimes; that derision and satire are weapons too feeble to destroy a vice which deserves detestation and horror from the human race; and that the theatre errs in throwing only ridicule upon a character so abominable, so shameful, and so afflicting to the church, and which ought to excite the tears and indignation rather than the laughter of believers.

But I say, that this eternal outcry against virtue; that the rash suspicions which always confound the pious man with the hypocrite; that the malignity which, in making the most pompous eulogiums on righteousness, finds no character amongst the upright who is entitled to them; I say, that such language, of which so little scruple is made by the world, saps religion, and tends to render all virtue suspicious: I say, that you thereby furnish arms to the impious in an age when too many other scandals countenance and authorize impiety. You assist in making them believe that none, truly pious, exist on the earth; that even the saints,

who have formerly edified the church, and whose memory we so warmly cherish, have held out to men only a false spectacle of virtue, of which, in reality, they had only the phantom and the appearance; and that the gospel hath produced none but pharisees and hypocrites. Do you, my brethren, comprehend all the guilt of these foolish mockeries? You think that you are only deriding false virtue, while you are blaspheming religion. I repeat it; in mistrusting the sincerity of the just of our own times, the freethinker concludes that all who have preceded them, and whom we see not, were equally insincere; that the martyrs themselves, who met death with such fortitude, and who rendered to truth the most shining and least suspicious testimony which can be given by man, were only madmen, who sought an earthly glory by a vain ostentation of courage and heroism; and, lastly, that the venerable tradition of so many saints, who, from age to age, have honoured and edified the church, is merely a tradition of knavery and deceit. And would to God that this were only a transport of zeal and exaggeration! we still hear with sorrow these blasphemies repeated always which strike us with such horror, and which ought to have been buried with paganism. And you, who shudder at them, unknowingly put them, however, into the mouth of the freethinker; it is your continual sarcasms and censures upon piety that have rendered, in our days, impiety so general and unpunished.

I might add, that, by these means, every thing in society becomes dubious and uncertain. There exists no longer, either good faith, integrity, or fidelity among

men. For, if we must no longer depend on the sincerity and virtue of the just; if their piety be only a mask to their passions, we shall assuredly not place any confidence in the probity of sinners and worldly characters: all men are consequently only cheats and villains, of whom too much care cannot be taken, and with whom we ought to live as with enemies; and they are so much the more to be dreaded, as, under a treacherous appearance of friendship and humanity, they conceal the design of either deceiving or ruining us. None but a heart profoundly wicked and corrupt can suppose such iniquity and corruption in that of others.

This leads me to the second feature of that temerity of which I am speaking. Yes, my brethren, that malignity, which sees guilt even through the appearances of virtue, and attributes criminal intentions to works of holiness, can proceed only from a dark and corrupt soul. As the passions have poisoned your heart, you for whom this discourse is intended; as you are capable yourself of every duplicity and meanness; as you have nothing in your own breast, upright, noble, or sincere; you easily suspect your brethren to be what you are; you cannot persuade yourself that there still exist simple, sincere, and generous hearts on the earth; you think that you every where see what you feel in yourself; you cannot comprehend how honour, fidelity, sincerity, and so many other virtues, always false in your own heart, should have more reality in the hearts of persons, even the most respectable for their rank and character; you resemble the courtiers of the king of the Ammonites; having no other occupation than that of being incessantly on the watch to supplant and lay

snares for each other, they had little difficulty in believing that David was not more upright in his intentions with regard to their master. You think, said they to that prince, that David means to honour the memory of your father, by sending comforters to you to condole with you on his death; they are not comforters, but spies, whom he sends to you: he is a villain, who, under the specious outside of an honourable and amicable embassy, seeks to discover the weakness of your kingdom, and to take measures to surprise you. Such is above all men the misfortune of courtiers; bred up, and living in deceit, they see it equally in virtue as in vice; as it is a stage upon which every one acts a borrowed character, they conclude that the pious man merely plays the part of virtue, and to them uncommon or unprofitable sincerity seems always impossible.

A good man upright, simple, and sincere, can hardly comprehend that there are impostors on the earth; he finds within himself an apology for other men, and, by what it would cost himself to be dishonest, he measures what it ought to cost others. Thus, my brethren, examine those who form these shameful and rash suspicions against the pious, and you will find that, in general, they are disorderly and corrupt characters, who seek to quiet themselves in their dissipations by the illusive supposition that their foibles are the foibles of all men; that those who are apparently the most virtuous, are superior to themselves only in the art of concealment; and that, were they narrowly examined, we should find them, in reality, made like other men. From this idea they derive a kind of horrible comfort in their debaucheries; they harden themselves in ini-

quity, by thus associating with themselves in it, all whom the supposed credulity of the people calls virtuous: they form to themselves a dreadful idea of the human race, in order to be less shocked with what they are forced to entertain of themselves: and they try to persuade themselves, that virtue no longer exists, in order that vice may appear to them more excusable; as if, O my God! the multitude of criminals could disarm thy wrath, or deprive thy justice of the right to punish guilt.

But, you say, we have seen so many hypocrites who have so long abused the world, by which they were regarded as saints, and friends of God, and who, nevertheless, were only perverse and corrupt men! I confess it with sorrow, my brethren: but, from that, what would you wish to conclude? That all the virtuous are similar to them? The conclusion is horrible; and what would become of mankind, were you to reason in this manner on the rest of men? How many wives have we not seen faithless to their honour and their duty! do modesty and fidelity therefore no longer exist in the sacred bond of marriage? How many magistrates have sold their honour, and disgraced their function! are justice and integrity consequently banished from every tribunal? History hath preserved to us the remembrance of too many perfidious, dissembling, unfaithful, and dishonourable princes; equally faithless to their subjects, their allies, and their enemies: do you suppose that integrity, truth, and religion, are therefore for ever excluded from a throne? Past ages have seen many subjects distinguished for their names, their offices, and the gifts of their sovereign, betray their prince

and country, and keep up the most criminal intelligence with the enemy: would you consider it just in the master whom you serve with so much zeal and courage, were he, merely upon such grounds, to suspect the truth of your fidelity? Why then is a suspicion, which excites the indignation of every other description of men, only supportable when directed against the pious? Why is a conclusion, so ridiculous in every other case, only judicious when brought against virtue? Does the perfidy of a single Judas give you grounds to conclude, that all the other disciples were traitors, and without faith? Does the hypocrisy of Simon the magician prove, that the conversion of the other disciples who embraced the faith, was merely an artifice to accomplish their own purposes; and that, like him, they walked not uprightly in the path of the Lord? What can be more unjust or foolish, than from the guilt of an individual, to constitute a general crime? It cannot be denied that vice may sometimes assume the garb of virtue; that the angel of darkness may sometimes transform itself into an angel of light; and that the passions, which generally try every means of success, may sometimes call in the appearances of piety to their aid, particularly under a reign in which piety, held in honour, is almost a certain road to fortune and favour. But it is the height of folly to reflect upon all virtue for the impious use which some individuals may make even of piety; and to believe that some abuses, discovered in an holy and venerable profession, dishonour all who have embraced it. The truth, my brethren, is, that we hate all men who are not similar to ourselves; and

that we are delighted to be enabled to condemn piety, because piety itself condemns us.

But we have so often been deceived, you say! I confess it: but, I say, in reply, that, granting even you are deceived while unsuspicious of your brethren, and while rendering to a fictitious virtue that esteem and honour which are due to real virtue alone, of what consequence would it be? by what would your credulity be followed, either sorrowful or disgraceful? You would have judged according to the rules of charity, which doth not easily believe in evil, and which delighteth in even the appearance of good; according to the rules of justice, which is incapable of doing unto others, what it would not wish to have done to itself; according to the rules of prudence, which judges only from what is visible, and leaves to the Lord to judge of the intentions and thoughts; according to the rules of goodness and humanity, which always presume in favour of our brethren. What would there be in such a mistake to alarm you? How noble for the mind, when the deception proceeds from a motive of humanity and kindness! What honour do not such mistakes render to a good heart; for none but the virtuous and the sincere are capable of them; but you, alas! not being such, prefer that deception which degrades the virtuous and pious man from that estimation which is his due, to hazarding the chance of not covering the hypocrite with the shame he deserves.

But, besides, whence springs this zeal and inveteracy against the abuse of real virtue by the hypocrite? Is the glory of God so warmly taken to heart by you, that you wish to avenge him on the impostors by whom

he is dishonoured? What matters it to you, who neither serve nor love him, whether the Lord be served by a double or a sincere heart? What is there deeply interesting to you in the integrity or the hypocrisy of his worshippers? You who know not even how he is worshipped? Ah! were he the God of your heart, did you love him as your Lord and Father, were his glory dear to you, we might then indeed pardon, as an excess of zeal, the boldness with which you stand up against the outrage done to God and his worship by the simulated piety of the hypocrite. The just, who love and serve him, are, it would seem, more entitled to cry out against an abuse so injurious to sincere piety; but you, who live like the heathen, who, sunk in debauchery, are without hope, and whose whole life is one continued scene of guilt, alas; it little belongs to you to espouse the cause of God's glory against the fictitious piety which is the cause of so much disgrace and sorrow to the church; whether he be served faithfully or otherwise, is no affair of yours. Whence then comes a zeal so misplaced? Would you desire to know? It is not the Lord whom you wish to avenge, nor is it his glory which interests you; it is the good name of the pious which you wish to stain; it is not hypocrisy which irritates your feelings, it is piety which displeases you; you are not the censurer of vice, you are only the enemy of virtue; in a word, you hate in the hypocrite only the resemblance of the pious.

In effect, did your censures proceed from a stock of religion and true zeal, you would feel only a sensation of sorrow in recollecting the history of those impostors, who have sometimes succeeded in deceiving the world.

What do I say? Far from producing with an air of triumph, these examples, you would lament over the scandal with which they have afflicted the church; far from applauding yourselves, when you renew their remembrance, you would wish that such melancholy events were for ever effaced from the memory of men. The law cursed him who should dare to uncover the shame and turpitude of those who had given him life; but it is the shame and dishonour of the church, your mother, which you expose with such pleasure to public derision. Do you take pleasure in recalling circumstances humiliating to your family, and which have formerly disgraced the name and life of some one of your ancestors? Would you not wish for ever to efface these hateful vestiges of disgrace from the histories which hand them down to posterity? Do you not consider as enemies to your name, those who ransack the records of past ages, in order to lay open these hateful particulars, and to revive them in the memory of men? Do you not, in opposition to their malignity, loudly proclaim the maxim of equity, that faults are personal, and that it is unjust to attach the idea of dishonour to all who bear your name, merely because it has once been disgraced through the bad conduct of an individual?

Apply the rule to yourself: the church is your family: the just are your relations, your brethren, your predecessors, your ancestors: they alone compose that family of first-born, to whom you ought to be eternally united. The wicked shall one day be as though they had never been; the ties of nature, of blood, and of society, which now unite you to them, shall perish; an immeasurable and eternal chaos shall separate them

from the children of God; they shall no longer be your brethren, your forefathers, or your relatives; they shall be cast out, forgotten, effaced from the land of the living, unnecessary to the designs of God, cut off for ever from his kingdom, and holding no longer, by any tie, to the society of the just, who shall then be your only brethren, your ancestors, your people, your tribe. Of what then, are you guilty when you uncover, with such pleasure, the ignominy of some pretended righteous who dishonour their history? It is your house, your name, your relations, your ancestors, whom you dishonour: you sully the splendour of so many glorious actions, which, in all ages, have rendered their memory immortal, by recalling the infidelity of an individual, who, bearing the name they bear, yet stains it by manners and a conduct totally dissimilar: upon yourselves then it is that you make the dishonour fall; unless you have already renounced the society of the holy, and prefer to associate your eternal lot with that of the wicked and the unfaithful.

But what is more particularly absurd in that temerity which is always so ready to judge and to blacken the intentions of the pious, is, that you thereby fall into the most ridiculous contradiction with yourselves: which is the last feature of this temerity I proposed to notice.

Yes, my brethren, you accuse them of striving towards their own gains, of having their own views in the most holy actions, and of only playing the part of virtue. But does it become you, the inhabitants of a court, to make this reproach? Your whole life is one continued act of disguise: you every where play a part

which is not your own: you flatter those whom you love not; you crouch to others whom you despise: you act the assiduous servant to those from whom you have favours to expect, though, in your heart, you look up with envy to their rank, and think them unworthy of their elevation: in a word, your whole life is an assumed character. Your heart, on every occasion, belies your conduct; your countenance is always in contradiction to your sentiments; you are the hypocrites of the world, of ambition, of favour, and of fortune; and it well becomes you, after that, to accuse the righteous of the same deception, and to proclaim so loudly their dissimulation and pretended hypocrisy: when you shall have nothing of a similar nature wherewith to reproach yourselves, then will your rash censures be listened to; otherwise you will have reason to be jealous for the glory of artifice and meanness, and to be dissatisfied, that the pious should dare to interfere with a science which so justly belongs, and is so especially adapted to you.

Besides, you cry out vehemently against the world, if paying too much attention to your actions, it maliciously interprets certain suspicious assiduities, or animated looks; you proclaim then, that, if things go on thus, no one will be considered innocent; that pious women will no longer be found in the world; that nothing is more easy than to give an air of guilt to the most innocent things; that it will be necessary totally to banish one's self from society, and to deny one's self every intercourse with mankind; you declaim then feelingly against the malignity of men, who, on the most trivial grounds, accuse you of criminal intentions. But do the pious give you more reason for the suspicions

you form against them? And, if it be permitted to you to hunt for guilt in them, though hidden under the appearances of virtue, why are you so enraged that the world should dare to suppose it in you, and should believe you criminal under the appearances of guilt?

Lastly, Women of the world! When we reproach you with your assiduity at theatres, and other places where innocence encounters so many dangers, when we censure the indecency and immodesty of your dress, you reply that you have no bad intentions; you wish injury to none: you wish indecent and criminal manners to be passed over, for the sake of a pretended innocency of intention, which your whole exterior belies; and you cannot allow to the pious, virtuous and laudable manners, for the sake of an integrity of heart, to which every thing external bears ample testimony. You require that your intentions shall be supposed pure, when your works are not so; and you think yourselves entitled to believe that the intentions of the pious are not innocent, when all their actions are visibly so. Cease, then, either to justify your own vices, or to censure their virtues.

It is thus, my brethren, that every thing poisons in our keeping, and that every thing removes us further from God: the spectacle even of virtue becomes to us a pretext for vice; and the examples themselves of piety become dangerous to our innocence. It would seem, O God! that the world doth not furnish us with sufficient opportunities for our ruin; that the examples of sinners are not sufficient to authorize our errors; for we seek a support for them even in the virtues of the just.

But you will tell us that the world is not so far wrong in censuring those who profess themselves people of piety; that such are every day seen, who, if possible, are more animated than other men in the pursuit of a worldly fortune, more eager after pleasures, more delicate in regard to injuries, more proud in elevation, and more attached to their own interests. This is the second unjust charge with which the pious are assailed by the world: not only does it interpret their intentions maliciously, which is an act of temerity, but it also scrutinizes their slightest imperfections, which is inhuman.

PART II. It may truly be said that the world is a more rigid and severe critic upon the pious than the gospel itself; that it exacts a greater degree of perfection from them, and that their faults find less indulgence before the tribunal of men than they shall one day experience before the tribunal of God himself.

Now, I say that this propensity to exaggerate the slightest errors of the pious, this additional feature of injustice into which the world falls with regard to them, is a proof of inhumanity, considering the weakness of man, the difficulty of virtue, and, lastly, the maxims of the world itself. I entreat your attention to this part, my brethren.

1. Inhumanity, considering the weakness of man. Yes, my brethren, it is an illusion to suppose that there are perfect virtues among men; it is not the condition of this mortal life: almost every pious man has his faults, his humours, and his peculiar weaknesses; grace corrects, but does not overturn nature; the Spirit of God, which creates in us a new man, leaves still ma-

ny remains of the old; conversion terminates our vices, but does not extinguish our passions; in a word, it forms the Christian within us, but it still leaves us men. The most righteous, consequently, still preserve many remains of the sinner: David, that model of penitence, still blended with his virtues a too great indulgence for his children, a secret feeling of pride at the number of his people and the prosperity of his reign: the mother of Zebedee's children, in spite of faith, through which she was so strongly attached to Jesus Christ, lost nothing of her anxiety for the elevation of her children, or of her concern towards procuring for them the first stations in an earthly kingdom: the apostles themselves disputed rank and precedency with each other. Never shall we be divested of all these little weaknesses till we are delivered from this body of death, which is the fountain from which they spring. The most shining virtue on earth hath always, therefore, its spots and its flaws, which are not to be too narrowly examined; and the just must always in some points resemble the rest of men. All, then, that can be exacted from human weakness is, that the virtues rise superior to the vices, the good to the evil; that the essential be regulated, and that we incessantly labour towards regulating the rest.

And surely, my brethren, overflowing with passions, as we are in this wretched life; loaded with a body of sin, which oppresses the soul; slaves to our senses and to the flesh; bearing within us an eternal opposition to the law of God; the continual prey of a thousand desires which combat against our souls; the everlasting sport of our inconstancy, and the natu-

ral instability of our heart; finding nothing within us but what is repugnant to duty; eagerly pursuing whatever removes us from God; disgusted with every thing which brings us nearer to him; loving only what tends to our ruin; hating only what tends to our salvation; weak in good; always ripe for evil; and, in a word, finding in virtue something dangerous to virtue itself, is it to be wondered at, that men, surrounded, filled with so many miseries, should at times allow some of them to be visible; that men, so corrupt, should not be always equally holy? And were you, in any measure, equitable, would you not rather find them deserving of praise for preserving some remains of virtue, than worthy of censure for possessing a few vices?

Besides, God hath his reasons for still leaving, to the most pious, certain visible weaknesses which revolt and offend you. In the first place, He thereby wisheth to humble them, and to render their virtue more secure by concealing it even from themselves. Secondly, he wisheth to animate their vigilance, for he leaveth not Amorites in the land of Canaan, that is to say, passions in the hearts of his servants, but, through the fear, lest freed from all their enemies, they should lull themselves in idleness and in a dangerous security. Thirdly, He wisheth to excite in them a continual desire for their eternal country, and to render their state of exile in this life more bitter, through a proper sense of those miseries, from which they can never, here below, obtain a complete deliverance. Fourthly, In order, perhaps, not to discourage sinners by the sight of too perfect a virtue, which might probably induce them to cease every exertion, under the idea of never being able to attain

it. Fifthly, In order to preserve to the just a continual subject of prayer and penitence, by leaving them a continual source of sin. Sixthly, to prevent those excessive honours which the world would render to virtue were it pure and sparkling, and lest it should find its recompense, in other words its source of danger, in the vain applauses of men. What shall I lastly say; It is perhaps still more to lull and to blindfold the enemies of piety; by the foibles of the pious to strengthen you, who listen to me, in the foolish opinion that there is no real virtue on the earth; to countenance you in your disorders, by the supposition that they are similar to yourselves; and to render unavailing to you all the pious examples of the just. You triumph in the weaknesses of the pious; yet are their weaknesses perhaps punishments from God on you, and means employed by his justice to nourish your unjust prepossessions against virtue, and completely to harden you in guilt. God is terrible in his judgments, and the end of iniquity is, in general, the consequence of iniquity itself.

But, *2dly*, Were your censures on those failings, which may still remain in the pious, not rendered barbarous and inhuman, when the natural weakness of man is considered, the difficulty alone of virtue would amply render them so.

For, candidly, my brethren, does it appear so easy to you to live according to God, and to walk in the straight path of salvation, that you should become so implacable against the pious, from the moment that they err, but for an instant? Is it so easy, continually to renounce one's self, to be ever on guard against one's own heart, to overcome its antipathies, to repress its

likings, to lower its pride, and to fix its inconstancy? Is it so easy a matter to restrain the sallies of the mind, to moderate its judgments, to disavow its suspicions, to soften its keenness, and to smother its malignity? Is it so easy to be the eternal enemy of one's own body, to conquer its indolence, to mortify its tastes, and to crucify its desires? Is it so natural to pardon injuries, to bear with contempt, to love, and even to load with benefits those who do evil to us, to sacrifice our fortune in order not to fail in duty to our conscience, to deny one's self pleasures to which all our inclinations lead us, to resist example, and singly to maintain the cause of virtue against the multitude which condemns it? Do all these appear, in fact, so easy to you, that you deem those, who for an instant depart from them, unworthy of the least indulgence? How feelingly do you expatiate every day on the difficulties of a Christian life, when we recommend to you these holy rules? Is it so very astonishing, that, in a long march through rough and dangerous ways, a man should sometimes stumble, or even fall, through fatigue and weakness?

Inhuman that we are! and, nevertheless, the slightest imperfection in the pious destroys, in our mind, all their most estimable qualities: far from excusing their weaknesses, in consideration of their virtue, it is their virtue itself which renders us doubly cruel and inexorable to their weaknesses. To be just, is sufficient, it would appear, to forfeit every claim to indulgence: to their vices we are clear sighted; to their virtues we are blind, and a moment of weakness sometimes effaces from our remembrance a whole life of fidelity and innocence.

But what renders your injustice towards the pious still more cruel, is, that it is your own examples, your irregularities, and even your censures, which stagger, weaken, and force them sometimes to imitate you; it is the corruption of your manners which becomes the continual and the most dangerous snare to their innocence; it is those foolish expressions of ridicule with which you continually assault virtue, that force them reluctantly to shelter themselves under the appearances of guilt. And how can you suppose it possible that the piety of the most righteous should always preserve itself pure, in the midst of the present manners, in a perverse world, whose customs are abuses, and its civilities crimes; where the passions are the only bond of society, and where the wisest and most virtuous are those who retrench from guilt only its scandal and publicity? How can you suppose it possible, that, amidst these eternal mockeries of the pious, which make them almost ashamed of virtue, and often oblige them to counterfeit vice; that, in the midst of so many disorders, authorized by the public manners, by senseless applauses, by examples rendered respectable by rank and dignity, by the ridicule cast on those who dare to hesitate at them, and, lastly, by the weakness even of their own heart; how do you think it possible that the pious should be always enabled to stem such a torrent; and that, obliged continually to fortify themselves against so rapid and so impetuous a course, which hurries away the rest of men, watchfulness and vigour should not sometimes fail them for an instant, and that they should not sometimes feel a momentary influence of the fatal vortex? You are their seducers; and you pretend to be displea-

sed because they allow themselves to be seduced? No longer, therefore, make them feel the reproach of your scandal by which their faith is weakened, and with which they shall one day reproach you before the tribunal of Jesus Christ; and triumph no more over their weaknesses, which are your own work, and for which they shall afterwards demand vengeance against you.

I have also said in the last place, that considering your maxims, you cannot be excused from severity and extravagance with respect to the pious. Judge for yourselves. You are continually saying, that such an individual, with all his devotion, never fails, however, to prosecute his own designs; that another is very attentive in paying court to his superiors; that a third again has a piety so delicate and sensible, that the merest trifle wounds and shocks it; that such an individual pardons nothing; that the other is not sorry to be still thought agreeable and amusing; that a third has a very commodious piety, and lives a very easy and agreeable life; lastly, that another is full of caprice and fancies, and that none of her household can put up with her temper; such are your daily discourses; nor do your satires stop there, for you boldly decide from thence that a devotion, blended with so many faults, can never lead them to salvation: these are your maxims. Yet, nevertheless, when you are told, from this seat, that a worldly, idle, sensual, dissipated, and profane life, such as you lead, can never be the way to salvation, you say that you cannot see any harm in it; you accuse us of severity, and of exaggerating the rules and duties of your station; you do not believe that more is required for salvation. But, my brethren, to which side

here do severity and injustice belong? You condemn the pious, because to their piety they add some particulars which resemble you; because they mingle some of your faults with an infinity of virtues and good works, which amply repair the errors: and you believe yourselves in the path of salvation, you who have only their faults, without even the piety which purifies them! O man! who then art thou that thus pretendest to save those whom the Lord condemneth, and to condemn those whom he justifieth?

Nor is this all; I will now shew you how little, on this point, you are consonant with yourselves. In effect, when you have seen the pious live in total retirement; when, no longer keeping any measures with the world, they conceal themselves from the eyes of the public; when they resign certain places of emolument and distinction, and divest themselves of all their employments and dignities, for the sole purpose of attending to their salvation; when they lead a life of tears, prayer, mortification, and silence, (and happily our age hath furnished such examples), what have you then said? That they carried matters too far; that violent counsels had been given them; that their zeal was not according to knowledge; that, were all to imitate them, public duties would be neglected; that those services, incumbent on every citizen to his country and state, would no longer be given; that such an extreme of singularity is not required; and that real devotion proves itself, by living together and fulfilling the duties of the station in which God hath placed us: such are your maxims. But, on the other hand, when the virtuous unite with piety the duties of their station, and the innocent interests of their

fortune; when they still keep up a certain degree of intercourse and society with the world, and shew themselves in places from which their rank does not allow them to banish themselves; when they continue to partake in certain public pleasures, which their station renders inevitable; in a word, when they are prudent in good, and simple in evil, ah! you then proclaim that they are made like other men; that it appears very easy to you, at that price, to serve God; that you see nothing in their devotion to frighten you; and that, if nothing more were required, you would soon be yourself a great saint. In vain may piety assume different shapes; it is sufficient that it is piety to displease you and to merit your censures. Be consistent with yourselves; you would have the pious to resemble yourselves; yet you condemn them from the moment that you can trace a resemblance.

The obstinacy and injustice of the Jews, recorded in the gospel, are renewed in you. When John the Baptist appeared in the desert, clothed in goats' skins, neither eating nor drinking, and holding out to Judea, an example of austere virtue which neither the righteous nor the prophets who preceded him, had ever equalled; they considered, says Jesus Christ, the austerity of his manners as the illusion of a false spirit, which seduced and urged him on to these excesses, merely that, he might find the recompense of his penance, in a worldly vanity. On the contrary, the Son of Man afterwards came, continues our Saviour, eating and drinking; exhibiting to them, in his conduct, the model of a virtue more consonant with human weakness, and serving as an example to all, by leading a

simple and ordinary life which all may imitate: Is he more sheltered from their censures? Alas! They declaim against him, as being a man of pleasure and a lover of good cheer; and his charity towards the frailties of mankind is considered by them as a kind of relaxation by which virtue is stained and dishonoured. Thus virtues the most opposite succeed only in attracting the same reproaches. Ah! my brethren, how much would the pious deserve to be pitied, were they to be judged before the tribunal of men! They know however that that world, which sits in judgment on them, is itself already judged.

And what renders this severity, with which you condemn the slightest imperfections of the pious, more deplorable, is, that, if a notorious and infamous sinner, after a whole life of iniquity and crimes, give, on the bed of death, some weak proof of repentance; if he but pronounce the name of that God whom he has never known, and has always blasphemed; if he at least consent, after many proofs of delay and repugnance, to receive the last offices of the church, which he formerly held in contempt; you are then ready to rank him among the saints; you maintain that he has died the death of a Christian; that he has attained a state of repentance; and that he has entreated forgiveness and mercy from God; upon these grounds you hope every thing for his salvation, and you no longer entertain a doubt but that the Lord hath shewn him mercy; some forced testimonies of religion, which have been extorted from him, are sufficient, in your idea, to secure to him the kingdom of God, into which nothing defiled shall ever enter; are sufficient, I say, in spite of the ex-

cesses and abominations of his whole life: and yet an entire life of virtue is not sufficient, in your opinion, to render salvation certain to the faithful, from the moment that they mingle the smallest infidelity with their past conduct: you save the wicked on the most frivolous and equivocal appearances of piety; and you condemn the just on the slightest and most excusable traits of human infirmity and weakness.

I might add, my brethren, that, consulting only your own interests, the imperfections of the pious ought to find you more indulgent and favourable.

For they alone, my brethren, spare you; they alone conceal your vices, smooth over your faults, excuse your errors, and, dwell with pleasure, upon whatever may be praise-worthy in your virtue, while the world, your equals, your rivals, and your pretended friends, perhaps lessen your talents and services, speak with contempt of all your good qualities, ridicule your defects, number your misfortunes amongst your faults, exaggerate those very faults, and put an ill construction on your most innocent words and actions; the virtuous alone excuse you, justify your heart, and are the apologists of your virtues, or the prudent dissemblers of your vices; they alone break up those conversations in which your glory and reputation are attacked; they alone refuse to join with the public against you; and, for them alone, you are destitute of humanity, and in them alone, you cannot pardon, even the virtues which render them estimable. Ah! my brethren, return them at least what they lend you; spare your protectors and apologists, and, by decrying them, do not weaken the only favourable testimony left you among men.

But further; not only do the pious refuse to join with the malignity of the public against you, but they alone are your true friends; they alone are touched with your misfortunes, affected by your wandering, and interested in your salvation; they carry you in their heart; while excusing your passions and irregularities before men, they silently lament over them before God; they raise up their hands for you to heaven; they supplicate your conversion; they entreat forgiveness for your crimes; and you cannot bring yourselves to render justice even to their piety and innocence? Ah! my brethren, they may make the same complaint to the Lord against you that the prophet Jeremiah formerly made against the Jews of his time, the unjust calumniators of his piety and conduct: "Give heed to me, O Lord," said that man of God, "and hearken to the voice of "them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompen- "sed for good: for they have digged a pit for my soul; "remember, that I stood before thee to speak good for "them, and to turn away thy wrath from them."

You begin now to feel, my brethren, the injustice of your conduct; but what would you consider it, if, in completing what I had at first intended, I were to shew you, that not only do you attribute corrupt motives to the good works of the pious, which is an act of temerity; not only do you exaggerate their slightest weaknesses, which is an act of inhumanity; but that, in addition, when you have nothing to say against the probity of their intentions, and when their imperfections give no handle to your censures, you fly to your last hold, that of casting an air of ridicule over their virtue itself; which is an act of impiety.

Yes, my brethren, an act of impiety. You turn religion into jest; you introduce it, like the pagans formerly, on an infamous theatre; and there you expose its holy mysteries, and all that is most sacred and most respectable on the earth, to the laughter of the spectators. You may apologize for your passions, through the weakness of constitution and human frailty; but your ridicule of virtue can find no excuse but in the impious contempt of virtue itself; this irreligious and blasphemous mode of speaking is nevertheless regarded as a pleasantry, as a sally of wit, and as a kind of language from which vanity appropriates to itself peculiar honour.

But, my brethren, you thereby persecute virtue, and render it useless to yourselves; you dishonour virtue, and render it useless to others; you try virtue, and render it insupportable to itself.

You persecute virtue, and render it useless to yourselves. Yes, my dear hearer, the example of the pious was a means of salvation provided for you by the goodness of God; his justice, therefore, indignant at your ridicule of his mercies to his servants, for ever withdraws them from you, and punishes your contempt of piety, by denying you the gift of piety itself. The kings of the earth take signal vengeance on those who dare to injure their statues, for these are to be considered as public and sacred monuments representing themselves. But the righteous on earth, are the living statues of the great king, the real images of the holy God; in them he hath painted the majesty of his purest and most resplendent features; and he for ever curseth those sacri-

legious and corrupt hearts who dare to make them a subject of derision and insult.

Besides, even granting that the Lord should not deny to you the gift of piety in punishment of your derision, it still forms an invincible human barrier which will for ever exclude you from that blessing. For I ask, if, when tired of the world, of your irregularities, and of yourself you wish to return to God, and to save that soul which you now labour to destroy, how can you venture to declare for piety, you who have so often made it the butt of your public and profane pleasantries? How can you ever take pride in the duties of religion, you who are every day heard to say, that, none but fools are devout; that such an individual had a thousand good qualities which rendered his society agreeable to all, but that devotion has now altered him to such a degree, that he is fully as insupportable as he was formerly pleasing, and that he affects to make himself ridiculous; that we must renounce common sense before we can erect, it would appear, the standard of piety; that, may God preserve you from such madness; that you endeavour to be an honest man, but, God be praised, you are no devotee. What language! That is to say, that God be praised you are already marked with the stamp of the reprobate; that you can say to yourself with confidence: "I shall never alter, but shall die "exactly such as I am." What impiety! And yet it is among Christians that such discourses are every day repeated ostentatiously, and with apparent satisfaction.

Ah! my brethren, permit me to vent my sorrow in one reflection. The patriarchs, with all their claims to

respect and veneration, even according to the ideas of the world, never had communication with the kings and nations of the different countries, where they were conducted by the order of the Lord, but in the following pious terms: "I fear the Lord." They claimed no respect from the grandeur of their race, whose origin was almost coeval with the world itself, from the lustre of their ancestors, from the splendour of the blood of Abraham, the conqueror of kings, the model of all the sages of the earth, and the only hero of whom the world could then boast. "We fear the Lord;" this was their most pompous title, their most august mark of nobility, the only character by which they wished to be distinguished from other men: such was the magnificent sign which appeared at the head of their tents and flocks, which shone on their standards, and every where bore with them the glory of their name, and that of the God of their fathers. And we, my brethren, we shun the reputation of the righteous who fear God, as a title of reproach and shame; we pompously dwell upon the vain distinctions of rank and birth; wherever we go, the frivolous mark of our names and dignities precede and announce us; and we hide the glorious sign of the God of our fathers; we even glorify ourselves, in not being among the number of those who fear and adore him. O God! suffer these madmen to enjoy so hideous a glory; confound their folly and impiety, by permitting them to the end to glorify themselves in their confusion and ignominy.

Nor is this all. By these deplorable mockeries not only do you render virtue useless to yourselves, but you likewise render it odious and useless to others; that is

to say, that not only do you bar against yourselves every path which leads to God, but you likewise shut it against an infinity of souls, whom grace still urges in secret to relinquish their crimes, and to live in a Christian manner; who dare not declare themselves, lest they should be exposed to the lash of your satire and profane raillery; who, dread only in their change of life the ridicule which you cast upon virtue; who, in secret, oppose only that single obstacle to the voice of Heaven which calls upon them; and tremblingly hesitate, in the great affair of eternity, betwixt the judgments of God and your senseless and impious derisions.

That is to say, you thereby blast the fruit of that gospel which we announce, and render our ministry unavailing; you deprive religion of its terrors and majesty, and spread through the whole exterior of piety a ridicule which falls upon religion itself. You perpetuate in the world, and support among men, those prejudices against virtue, and that universal illusion employed by Satan to deceive them, which is that of treating piety as a perverse system of folly; you authorize the blasphemies of free-thinkers and of the wicked; you accustom sinners to arrogate to themselves an ostentatious glory from vice and irregularity, and to consider debauchery as fashionable and genteel when contrasted with the ridicule of virtue. Lastly: Through your means piety becomes a fable to the world, the sport of the wicked, the shame of sinners, the scandal of the weak, and the stumbling block even of the righteous; through you vice is held in honour, virtue is debased, truth is weakened, faith is extinguished, religion

is annihilated, and corruption is universally spread; and, as it was foretold by the prophet, desolation perseveres even to the consummation and to the end.

Further; through you, virtue becomes insupportable to itself: your jests weaken the piety even of the just; you shake their faith; you discourage their zeal; you suspend their good desires; you stifle in their heart the liveliest impressions of grace; you arrest them in a thousand deeds of fervour and virtue, which they dare not expose to your impious censures; you force them in spite of themselves, to conform to your habits and maxims, which they detest, to abandon their retirement, their mortifications, and their prayers, and to consecrate to these duties only those concealed moments which may escape your knowledge and raillery; through these means, you deprive the church of their edifying example; you deprive the weak of that assistance they would otherwise derive from it, sinners of that shame with which their presence would cover them, the just of that consolation which would animate them, and religion of a sight which would do it honour.

Alas, my brethren! In former ages tyrants never derided Christians, but in reproaching them with their supposed superstitions: they ridiculed the public honours which they saw them render to Jesus Christ, a person, who had met with an ignominious death, and they found a subject of derision in the preference which was given to him by Christians, over Jupiter and all the gods of the empire, whose worship was become respectable through the pomp and magnificence of their temples and altars, the antiquity of the laws, and the majesty of the Cesars: but, on the other hand, they

bestowed loud and public praises on their manners; they admired their modesty, frugality, charity and patience, their innocent and mortified life, and their absence from theatres, and every other place of public amusement; they could not behold without veneration, the wise, retired, modest, humble, and benevolent manners of those simple and faithful believers. You, on the contrary, more senseless, find no fault with them for adoring Jesus Christ, and for placing their confidence and hope of salvation in the mystery of the cross; but you hold it ridiculous that they should deny themselves every public pleasure; that they should live in the practice of retirement, mortification and prayer; you esteem them worthy of your derision and censure, because they are humble, simple, chaste, and modest: and the Christian life, which found admirers and panegyrists even among tyrants, experiences from you only mockery and profane raillery.

What folly, my brethren! to find in this world, which is itself but a mass of trifles and absurdities, those only, worthy of ridicule who know its frivolity, and whose only thoughts are bent on making themselves secure from the wrath to come! What folly, to despise in men the very qualities which render them pleasing to God, beloved by angels, and useful to their fellow creatures! What folly, to be convinced that an eternal happiness or misery awaits us, yet to consider those only ridiculous who are interested in so important an affair!

Let us respect virtue, my brethren; she alone, on the earth. merits our admiration and praise. If we find ourselves still too weak to fulfil her duties, let us at

least be just, and respect her lustre and innocence; if we cannot live the life of the righteous, let us wish to attain it, and let us envy their lot; if we cannot as yet imitate their example, let us consider every mockery of virtue not only as a blasphemy against the holy Spirit, but as an outrage on humanity, which virtue alone honours and dignifies; far from reproaching the godly with those virtues which render them dissimilar to us, let us reproach ourselves with the vices which prevent us from resembling them; in a word, let us, by a true and sincere respect for piety, deserve to obtain one day the gift of piety itself.

And you, my brethren, who serve the Lord, remember, that the interests of virtue are in your hands; that the foibles with which you stain it, become, as I may say, spots on religion itself; consider how much the world expects from you, and what engagements you contract towards the public, when you espouse the cause of piety; consider with what dignity, what fidelity, what respectability, you ought to support the character and part of a servant of Jesus Christ. Yes, my brethren, let us, support with majesty, the interests of piety, against the sneers of those who despise it; let us purchase the right of being insensible to their censures, by giving no foundation for them; let us force the world to respect what it cannot love; let us not make of the holy profession of piety a source of sordid gain, a vile worldly interest, a life of ill nature and caprice, a claim to effeminacy and idleness, a singularity from which we arrogate honour, a prejudice, a spirit of intolerance which flatters us, and a spirit of division which separates us from our fellow-creatures; let us make it the

price of eternity, the path to heaven, the rule of our duties, and the reparation of our crimes; let us carry with it a spirit of modesty which makes us unassuming, a feeling of compunction which humbles us, a gentleness which draws us to our brethren, a charity which makes us bear with them, an indulgence which attracts their regard, a spirit of peace which ties us to them; and, lastly, an union of hearts, of desires, of affections, of good and evil on the earth, which shall be the forerunner and hope of that eternal union which charity is to consummate in heaven.

SERMON XXI.

ON THE RESPECT DUE TO THE TEMPLES OF GOD.

MATTHEW XXI. 12.

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

WHY, my brethren, did our Saviour on this occasion allow the marks of zeal and indignation to be visible in his countenance? Is this that King of Peace who was to appear in Sion armed with his meekness alone? We have seen him sitting in judgment over an adulteress, and he hath not condemned even her. We have seen the prostitute at his feet, and he hath graciously forgiven her debaucheries and scandals. His disciples wished him to make the fire of heaven descend upon an ungrateful and perverse city; but he

reproached them with being still unacquainted with that new spirit of mercy and charity which he came to spread throughout the earth. He hath just been lamenting with tears the miseries which threaten Jerusalem, that criminal city, the scene of the murder of the prophets, which is on the eve of sealing the sentence of her reprobation by the iniquitous death she is so soon to inflict on him whom God had sent to be her Redeemer. On every occasion he hath appeared feeling and merciful; and, in consequence of the excess of his meekness, he hath been called the friend even of publicans and sinners.

What then is the nature of these outrages which now triumph over his clemency, and arm his gracious hands with the rod of justice and wrath? The holy temple is profaned; his Father's house is dishonoured; the place of prayer, and the sacred asylum of the penitent, is turned into a house of traffic and avarice: and hence it is that the lightning of indignation appears now in those eyes which have heretofore beamed only with compassion upon sinners. Hence it is that he is compelled to terminate a ministry of love and reconciliation, by an act of severity and wrath similar to that with which he had opened it. For I beg you to remark, that what Jesus Christ doth here, in the termination of his career, he had already done, when, after thirty-three years of a private life, he entered for the first time into Jerusalem, there to open his mission, and to do the work of his Father. Otherwise it might have been said that he had himself forgotten that spirit of meekness and of long-suffering which was to distinguish his ministry

from that of the ancient covenant, and under which he was announced by the prophets.

Many other sources of scandal, besides those seen in the temple, doubtless took place in that city, and were perhaps no less worthy of the zeal and chastisement of the Saviour; but, as if his Father's glory had been less wounded by them, he can conceal them for a time, and delay their punishment. He bursts not forth at once against the hypocrisy of the pharisees, and the corruption of the scribes and priests; but the chastisement of the profaners of the temple can admit of no delay; his zeal on this occasion admits of no bounds; and scarcely is he entered into Jerusalem when he flies to the holy place, to avenge the insulted honour of his Father, and the tarnished glory of his temple.

Of all crimes, indeed, by which the greatness of God is insulted, I see few more deserving of his chastisement than the profanation of his temples: and this impiety is so much the more criminal, as the feelings required of us by religion, when assisting there, ought to be more holy.

For, my brethren, since our temples are a new heaven, where God dwelleth with men, they require of us the same disposition of mind as those of the blessed in the heavenly temple; that is to say, that the earthly altar, being the same as that of heaven, and the Lamb, who offers himself and is sacrificed there, being the same, the feelings of those around him ought to be alike. Now, the first state of the blessed before the throne of God and the altar of the Lamb, is a sentiment of purity and innocence. The second, a feeling of religion and internal humiliation. Thirdly, and lastly,

a state even of decency and of modesty in dress. These dispositions comprise all the feelings of faith with which we ought to enter the temples of God; a sentiment of purity and innocence; a sentiment of adoration and internal humiliation; a state of external decency and modesty in dress.

PART I. The whole universe is a temple, which God filleth with his glory, and with his presence. Wherever we go, says the apostle, he is always near us; in him we live, move, and have our being. If we mount up to the heavens, he is there; if we plunge to the center, there shall we find him; if we traverse the ocean and mount on the wings of the winds, it is his hand that guides us; and he is alike the God of the distant isles which know him not, as of the kingdoms and regions which invoke his name.

Nevertheless, in all ages, men have consecrated places to him which he hath honoured with a special presence. The patriarchs erected altars to him on certain spots where he had appeared. The Israelites, in the desert, considered the tabernacle as the place in which his glory and his presence continually resided; and, when afterwards, they arrived at Jerusalem, they invoked him with the solemnity of incense and of victims, only in that august temple erected to him by Solomon. It was the first temple consecrated by men to the true God. It was the most holy place in the universe; the only one where it was permitted to offer up gifts and sacrifices to the Lord. From all quarters of the earth the Israelites were obliged to come there to worship him; while captives in foreign kingdoms, their

eyes, their wishes, and their homages were incessantly bent toward that holy place; in the midst of Babylon, Jerusalem and her temple were always the source of their delight, and of their regrets, and the object of their worship and of their prayers; and Daniel chose to expose himself to all the fury of the lions, rather than fail in that pious duty, and deprive himself of that consolation. Jerusalem indeed had often seen infidel princes, attracted by the sanctity and the fame of her temple, coming to render homage to a God whom they knew not; and Alexander himself, struck with the majesty of the place, and with the august gravity of its venerable pontiff, remembered that he was man, and bowed his proud head before the God of hosts whom they there worshipped.

At the birth of the gospel, the houses of believers were at first domestic churches. The cruelty of tyrants obliged those first disciples of faith to seek obscure and hidden places, in order to conceal themselves from the rage of persecution, there to celebrate the holy mysteries, and to invoke the name of the Lord. The majesty of the ceremonies entered into the church only with that of the Cesars: Religion had its Davids and its Solomons, who blushed to inhabit superb palaces, while the Lord had not where to lay his head: sumptuous edifices gradually rose up in our cities: the God of heaven and of earth again, if I may dare to say so, resumed his rights; and the temples themselves, where the demon had so long been invoked, were restored to him as to their rightful master, were consecrated to his worship, and became his dwelling-place.

But they are now no longer empty temples like that of Jerusalem, where every thing was represented by types and figures. The Lord dwelt then in the heavens, said the prophet, and his throne was above the clouds; but since he hath deigned to appear upon the earth, to hold converse with men, and to leave us in the mystical benedictions, the real pledge of his body and of his blood, actually contained under these sacred signs, the heavenly altar hath no longer any advantage over ours: the victim which we there immolate is the Lamb of God; the bread in which we participate is the immortal food of the angels and blessed spirits; the mystical wine we there drink is that new beverage which they quaff in the kingdom of the heavenly Father; the sacred canticle we there sing, is that with which the throne of the Lamb continually resounds; lastly, our temples are those new heavens promised by the prophet to men. We see not fully there, it is true, all that is seen in the heavenly Jerusalem, for here below we see only mystically, and, as it were, through a veil; but we possess him, we enjoy him, and heaven hath no longer any advantage over the earth.

Now, I say, that our temples being a new heaven, filled with the glory and the presence of the Lord, the state of innocence and purity is the first requisite by which we are entitled, like the blessed in the eternal temple, to appear there; for the God before whom we appear is an holy God.

In effect, my brethren, the idea of the holy God, existing throughout the universe, is one of the greatest motives held out by religion to induce us every where to walk before him in purity and in innocence. As all

creatures are sanctified by the intimate residence of the divinity who dwelleth in them, and all places are full of his glory and immensity, the divine writings incessantly warn us every where to respect the presence of God who seeth and who watcheth us; on no occasion to offer any thing to his eyes which may wound the sanctity of his observation; and not to sully with our crimes that earth which is his temple and the dwelling-place of his glory. The sinner, who bears an impure conscience, profanes therefore his majesty, and is unworthy of living upon the earth; for, by the situation alone of his corrupt heart, he every where dishonours the presence of the holy God who is always beside him, and he profanes every spot to which he bears his crimes, for all places are sanctified through the immensity of the God who filleth and consecrateth them.

But, if the universal presence of God be a reason why we should every where appear pure and without stain to his eyes, doubtless those places which, in that universe, are particularly consecrated to him, our temples, namely, in which the divinity, as I may say, corporeally resides, much more require that we should appear in them pure and without stain, lest the sanctity of the God who filleth and dwelleth in them be dishonoured.

Thus, when the Lord had permitted Solomon to erect, to his glory, that temple so famed for its magnificence, and so venerable for the splendour of its worship, and the majesty of its ceremonies, what rigid precautions did he not take, lest men should abuse his goodness in choosing a special dwelling-place amid them, and lest they should dare to appear there, in his presence, covered with stains and pollution! What barriers did

he not place between himself, if I may so speak, and man; and, in drawing near to us, what an interval did not his sanctity leave between the spot filled with his presence, and the vows of the people who came to invoke him!

Yes, my brethren, listen to a description of it. Within the enclosure of that vast edifice which Solomon consecrated to the majesty of the God of his fathers, the Lord chose only, for the place of his abode, the most retired and the most inaccessible spot; in that spot was the holy of holies, that is to say, the only part of that immense temple which was regarded as the dwelling-place and the temple of the Lord upon the earth. And, again, what terrible precautions defended its approach! An outer and far distant wall surrounded it; and there, the gentiles and foreigners, who wished to be instructed in the law, could only approach. Secondly, Another wall still very distant concealed it; and there the Israelites alone were entitled to enter it; yet was it necessary that they should be free from stain, and that they had carefully purified themselves, through certain prescribed fastings and ablutions, before they could dare to approach a place still so distant from the holy of holies. Thirdly, Another advanced wall still separated it from the rest of the temple; and there the priests alone entered every day to offer sacrifices, and to renew the sacred loaves exposed upon the altar. The law required that every other Israelite who should dare to approach it should be put to death as a sacrilegious profaner; and even a king of Israel, who thought himself entitled, through his real dignity, to come there to offer up incense, was instantly covered with leprosy, degraded

from his royalty, and excluded for the rest of his life from all society and commerce with men. Lastly, After so many barriers and walls of separation appeared the holy of holies; that place, so terrible and so concealed, covered with an impenetrable veil, inaccessible to every mortal, to every righteous, to every prophet, even to the ministers of the Lord, the sovereign pontiff alone excepted; and, even he was entitled to appear there only once in the year, after a thousand strict and religious precautions, and bearing in his hands the blood of the victim for which alone the gates of that sacred place were opened.

Yet, after all, what did that holy of holies, that spot so formidable and so inaccessible, contain? The tables of the law, the manna, the rod of Aaron; empty figures, and the shadows of futurity: The holy God himself, who sometimes gave out from thence his oracles, yet dwelt not there as in the sanctuary of Christians, the gates of which are indiscriminately opened to every believer.

Now my brethren, if the goodness of God in a law of love and grace, hath no longer placed these terrible barriers between him and us, if he hath destroyed that wall of separation which removed him so far from man, and hath permitted every believer to approach the holy of holies, where he himself now dwelleth, it is not that his sanctity exacts less purity and innocence of those who come to present themselves before him. His design hath only been to render us more pure, more holy, and more faithful, and to make us feel what ought to be the sanctity of a Christian: since

he is every day obliged to support, at the foot of the altar, and of the sanctuary, the presence of the God whom he invokes and worships.

And for this reason it is that Peter calls the Christians an holy nation; because they are all equally entitled to present themselves before the holy altar: a chosen race, because they are all separated from the world and from every profane custom, consecrated to the Lord, and solely destined to his worship and service: and, lastly, a royal priesthood; for they all participate, in one sense, in the priesthood of his Son, the High Priest of the new law, and because the privilege of entering into the holy of holies, formerly granted to the sovereign pontiff alone, is become the common and daily right of every believer.

It is solely through the sanctity, then, of our baptism and of our consecration, that these sacred gates are opened to us. If impure, we, in some respect, forfeit this right; we have no longer a claim to approach the altar; we are no longer worthy of the assembly of the holy, and the temple of God is no longer for us.

Our temples, my brethren, ought therefore to be the house of the righteous alone. Every thing that takes place there supposes righteousness and sanctity in the spectators; the mysteries which we there celebrate are holy and awful mysteries, and such as require pure eyes; the victim we there offer up is the reconciliation of the penitent, or the bread of the strong and perfect; the sacred anthems heard there are the groanings of a contrite heart, or the sighs of a chaste and believing soul. And on this account it is that the

church takes care to purify every thing that is to appear on the altar: she consecrates with prayers even the stones of these holy buildings, as if to render them worthy of sustaining the presence and the looks of the God who dwelleth in them: she exposes at the doors of our churches water sanctified by prayers, and recommends to believers to sprinkle it over their heads before they enter into the holy place, as if to complete their purification from any slight stains which might still remain; lest the sanctity of the God before whom they are about to appear should be injured by their impurity.

Formerly, the church permitted no tombs to the bodies of believers within the circle of her sacred walls: she received not into that holy spot the remnants of their mortality: she thought that the temple of God, that the new heaven which he had filled with his presence and glory, ought not to serve as an asylum to the ashes of those whom she numbered not as yet among the blessed.

Even public penitents were, for a long time, excluded from assisting at the holy mysteries. Prostrated at the doors of the temple, covered with hair-cloth and ashes, the assembly of believers was denied to them equally as to the anathematized: their tears and their mortifications alone opened to them at last these sacred gates. And what joy must they not have felt, when, after having long groaned and supplicated for their reconciliation, they found themselves in the temple among their brethren; they once more beheld those altars, that sanctuary, those ministers so deeply engaged in the awful mysteries; they heard their names

pronounced at the altar with those of the believers, and sung with them hymns and holy songs! What tears of rapture and of religion were then shed! What regret did they feel for having so long deprived themselves of so sweet a consolation! A single day, O my God, passed in thy holy house, said they no doubt with the prophet, is more consoling to the heart, than whole years spent in pleasure, and in the tents of the wicked! Such were formerly the temples of Christians. "Far from these sacred walls," said then the minister with a loud voice to all the assembly of believers, "far from these sacred walls be the unclean, "the impure, the worshippers of idols, and whosoever "loveth or maketh a lie."

The church, it is true, no longer makes this rigorous discrimination. The multitude of believers, and the corruption of morals, having rendered it impossible, she opens the gates of our temples indifferently to the righteous, and to sinners: she draws aside the veil of her sanctuary in presence even of the profane; and, her ministers no longer wait the departure of the sinful and unclean, in order to begin her awful mysteries. But the church supposes, that, if you be not righteous in coming before the majesty of a God so holy, you bring with you at least desires of righteousness and of penitence: she supposes, that, if you be not yet altogether purified from your crimes, you at least feel contrition for them; that you come to lament them at the foot of the altar; and that your confusion and your sincere regret for your faults, are now to begin your justification and your innocence.

It is therefore your aspirations after a more Christian life that alone can authorize your appearing in this holy place if you be sinners; and, if you come not here to lament over your crimes, but bring with you, even to the foot of the altar, the will, and an actual and rooted affection for them, the church, it is true, who sees not, nor judges the heart, excludes you not from these sacred walls; but God invisibly rejecteth you. In his eyes you are accursed and excommunicated, and have no right to participate at the altar, or in the sacrifices; you are one who is about to stain, by you presence alone, the sanctity of these awful mysteries, to seat yourself in a place where you have no right to be seated, and from whence the angel of the Lord, who watches at the gate of the temple, invisibly chases you, as he formerly chased the first sinner from that place of innocence and of sanctity, which the Lord sanctified with his presence.

And in effect, to feel guilty of the most shameful crimes, and yet to appear in the most holy place of the earth; to appear before God, without being at least touched with shame and sorrow, without thinking at least upon the means of quitting so deplorable a situation, without at least wishing it, and forming some sentiments of religion; to bring even to the foot of the altar defiled bodies and souls; to force the eyes of God himself, if I may so speak, to familiarize themselves with guilt, without at least confessing to him the sorrow of thus appearing before him covered with shame and reproach, and saying to him, like Peter; "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man;" or, like the prophet, "Hide thy face from my sins, and

"blot out all mine iniquities," that I may be worthy of appearing here in thy presence; is to profane the temple of God, to insult his glory and majesty, and the sanctity of his mysteries.

For, my brethren, be ye whom ye may who approach the altar, you are about to offer up spiritually with the priest the awful sacrifice: you come for the purpose of presenting to God the blood of his Son, as the propitiation of your sins: you come to appease his justice, through the dignity and the excellence of these holy offerings; and to represent to him the claim which you have upon his mercies, since the blood of his Son hath purified you, and that you no longer form in one sense with him, but one priest, and one victim. Now, when you appear with an hardened and corrupt heart, without any sentiment of faith, or any desire of amendment, you disavow the ministry of the priest who offers in your stead: you disavow the prayers he sends up to the Lord, in which, through the mouth of the priest, you entreat him to cast his propitious looks on these holy offerings which are upon the altar, and to accept of them as the price of the abolition of your crimes: you offer an insult to the love of Jesus Christ himself, who renews the great sacrifice of your redemption, and who presents you to his Father as a portion of that pure and spotless church which he hath washed in his blood: you offer an insult to the piety of the church, who, believing you united in her faith and in her charity, places in your mouth, through the hymns which accompany the holy mysteries, sentiments of religion, of sorrow, and of penitence. Lastly, You deceive the faith and the piety of the righteous there pre-

sent, and who, considering you as forming with them only one heart, one mind, and one and the same sacrifice, join with you, and offer to the Lord your faith, your desires, your prayers, as their own. You are there, then, as one anathematized, separated from all the rest of your brethren; an impostor, who secretly disavows what you are publicly professing, and who insults religion, and rejects all share in the redemption and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, at the very moment that he is renewing the memory of it and offering up the price of it to his Father.

What are we thence to conclude? That, sinners ought to banish themselves from our temples, and from the holy mysteries? God forbid. It is they who ought to come to this holy place in search of their deliverance; it is they who ought to solicit, at the foot of the altar, the tender mercies of the Lord, ever ready in that place to lend a favourable ear to sinners; it is they who ought to call in every religious aid held out to faith, to arouse in themselves, if possible, some sentiments of piety and of repentance. And whither, my brethren, ought we to fly, when unhappily fallen under the displeasure of God! And what other resource could remain for us? It is here alone that sinners can find a refuge: here flow the quickening waters of the sacrament, which alone possess the virtue of purifying the conscience: here is offered up for them the sacrifice of propitiation, alone capable of appeasing the justice of God, which their crimes have irritated: here the truths of salvation, impressed on their heart, inspire them with hatred against sin, and love of righteousness: here will they find their ignorance enlightened, their errors dis-

sipated, their weakness supported, their good desires strengthened: here, in a word, religion offers remedies for all their ills. It is emphatically therefore, sinners, who ought most to frequent these holy temples; and the more their wounds are inveterate and hopeless, the more eagerly ought they to fly here in search of a cure.

The state of innocence and purity therefore, is the first requisite, which the presence of an holy God requires of us, as of the blessed in heaven: "For they "are without fault before the throne of God."

But if a state of guilt, without remorse, without any wish for a change, and with an actual intention of persevering in it, be of itself a kind of irreverence, by which the sanctity of our temples and of our mysteries is profaned; in what light, O God! wilt thou regard him who chooses these holy places, and the hour of the awful mysteries, to breathe his unhallowed passions, to indulge in impure thoughts, to form criminal desires, to seek opportunities which decency alone prevents him from seeking elsewhere, perhaps to meet objects whom the vigilance of those who observe us keeps at a distance in all other places? How criminal will it be considered to make the most holy things of religion instrumental to guilt, to choose thy presence, great God! for the purpose of concealing the secret of an impure passion, and to make thy holy temple a rendezvous of iniquity, a place more dangerous than even those assemblies of sin which religion interdicts to believers? What greater degree of guilt, can be imagined than to crucify afresh Jesus Christ in the very place where he offers himself up for us every day to

his Father; to employ, in order to forward our own ruin, the very hour in which the mysteries of salvation, and the redemption of all men, are operated! What madness, to choose the presence of our Judge in order to render him the witness of our crimes, and of that presence to make the most horrible cause of our condemnation! What a neglect of God, and what a mark of reprobation, to change the sacred asylums of our reconciliation into opportunities of debauchery and licentiousness!

Great God! when insulted on mount Calvary, where thou still manifested thyself a God of long suffering, the tombs opened around Jerusalem; the dead arose, as if to reproach their descendants with the horror of their sacrilege. Re-animate them oh God! the ashes of our fathers who await, in this holy temple the blessed immortality! let their bodies rise out of these pompous tombs which our vanity hath erected to them, and, inflamed with an holy indignation against impieties which crucify thee afresh, and which profane the sacred asylum of their mortal remains, let them appear upon these monuments; and since our instructions and threats are unavailing, let them appear themselves to reproach their successors with their irreligion and sacrilege. But if the terror of thy presence, O God! be insufficient to preserve in them a due respect; were the dead even to rise up, as thou hast formerly said, they would, in consequence of it, be neither more religious nor more believing.

But if the presence of an holy God require here, as of the blessed in heaven, a state of purity and innocence; the presence of a God, terrible and full of ma-

jesty, ought to awaken feelings of dread and mental abasement; such as marked the profound humiliation of the blessed in the heavenly temple; "And they fell "before the throne on their faces, and worshipped "God."

PART II. God is a spirit and truth, and it is in spirit and in truth that he requireth principally to be honoured. That state of profound humiliation, which we owe to him in our churches, consists not alone therefore, in the external posture of our bodies; it also comprises, like that of the blessed in heaven, a spirit of adoration, of praise, of prayer, and of thanksgiving; and such is that spirit of religion and of humiliation which God demandeth of us in the holy temple, like that of the blessed in the heavenly temple.

I say a spirit of adoration; for as it is here that God manifesteth his wonders and his supreme greatness, and descendeth from heaven to receive our homages, the first sentiment formed within us on entering into this holy place, ought to be a sentiment of terror, of silence, and profound recollection, of internal humiliation, on comparing the majesty of the most High with our own meanness; we ought to be occupied with God alone who sheweth himself to us; to feel all the weight of his glory and of his presence; to collect all our attention, all our thoughts, all our desires, our whole soul, in order to pay him its homage, and to cast it wholly at the feet of the God whom we worship; to forget all the grandeurs of the earth; to see only him, to be occupied only with him; and, by our profound humiliation, to confess, like the blessed in heaven, that

he alone is almighty, he alone immortal, he alone great, he alone worthy of all our love and of all our homage.

But, alas! my brethren, Where do we find in our churches those humble souls, who, trembling with an holy dread at the sight of these sacred places, feel all the weight of the majesty of the God who dwelleth in them, and are incapable of supporting the splendour of his presence, otherwise than in the immobility of a humiliated body, and the profound religion of an adoring soul? Where are those, who, losing sight of all the glory of the earth, are here occupied with that of God alone? Let us say it boldly before a king whose profound respect, at the foot of the altar, does equal honour to religion and to himself; it is not to honour the God who dwelleth here, that too many enter into this holy temple; it is to cover themselves with the cloak of piety, and to make it instrumental towards their views and interests, which a sincere piety condemns; they come to bow the knee, as Haman bowed it before the profane altar, to attract the notice and to follow the example of a pious prince; they come here to seek another God than he who appears on our altars; to make their court to another master than the supreme Master; to seek other favours than the grace of Heaven, and to attract the kindness of another benefactor than the immortal One. Amid a crowd of worshippers he is an unknown God in his own temple, as he was formerly in heathen Athens. Every look is directed to the prince, whose views are all directed to God: the wishes of all are addressed to him; and his profound humiliation at the foot of the altar, far from

teaching us to respect the Lord, before whom a great king bows his head and forgets all his greatness, teaches us only to take advantage of his religion, and of the favours with which he honours virtue, to adopt their semblance, and, through that deception, to exalt ourselves to new degrees of greatness upon the earth. Is not this, Oh God! what thou didst announce to thy disciples, that the time would come when faith should be extinguished, when piety would become a source of infamous traffic, and when men, living without God upon the earth, would no longer acknowledge thee, but in order to make thee subservient to their iniquitous desires?

A spirit of prayer is also comprised in this feeling of humiliation; for the more we are struck here with the greatness and with the power of the God whom we worship, the more do our endless wants warn us to have recourse to him, from whom alone we can obtain relief and deliverance. Thus the church is the house of prayer, where every one ought to come for the purpose of laying his secret wants before the Lord; where, in times of public calamity, he is appeased by the general prayers; where assembled ministers lift up their hands for the sins of the people, and where the eyes of the Lord are ever open to our wants, and his ears attentive to our cries.

Not but that we may address ourselves to him, as the apostle says, in every place; but the church is the spot where he is more propitious, and where he hath promised to be always present to receive our homage, and to lend a favourable ear to our requests. Yes, my brethren, it is here that we ought to come to

join in lamentation with the church, over the scandals with which she is afflicted, over the divisions with which she is torn, and over the dangers which surround her, over the obstinacy of sinners, and the coldness of charity among believers: we join with her in soliciting the mercies of the Lord upon his people; we entreat of him the cessation of wars and other public scourges, the extinction of schisms and errors, the knowledge and the love of righteousness and of truth for sinners, and perseverance for the just. You ought, therefore, to come with an attentive and collected mind, a heart, which offers nothing to the eyes of God that may avert the favours solicited by the church for you, and to appear with that exterior humiliation, which, of itself, shews that you pray and worship.

Nevertheless, my brethren, while the ministers of God are lifting up their hands here for you; are supplicating him for the prosperity of your families, for abundance to your lands, for the preservation of your relations and children, who perhaps expose themselves for the welfare of their country, for the end of wars, dissentions, and all the miseries with which we are afflicted; while they are entreating remedies for your errors and aids for your weakness; while they are imploring the holy God in your favour, you deign not even to accompany their prayers with attention and respect. You dishonour the holy solemnity of the church's lamentations by a spirit of inattention, and by indecencies which would scarcely be tolerated even in those criminal places of resort where you listen to profane songs; and the only difference in your behaviour is, that, in the one, you are touched and rendered atten-

tive by a lascivious harmony, while here you endure, with impatience, the divine songs of thanksgiving and praise.

Thus, my brethren, instead of the arm of the Lord, so long impending over our heads, being arrested by public prayers; instead of the supplications, which resound in every part of our temples, being able, as formerly, to suspend the scourge of Heaven, to bring back days of peace and of tranquillity, to reconcile nations and kings, and to attract peace from heaven to the earth; alas! the days of evil still endure; the times of trouble, of mourning, and of desolation cease not; war and fury seem to have for ever taken up their abode among men; the desolate widow calls out for her husband; the afflicted father in vain looks for his child; brother is divided from brother; even our victories shed mourning and sorrow through our families, and we are forced to weep over our own triumphs. Whence comes this, my brethren? Alas! it is because the prayers of the church, the only sources of the favours which God sheddeth upon kingdoms and upon empires, are no longer listened to; and because you force the Lord, to avert his ears, and to turn his attention from them, by the irreverence with which her supplications are accompanied, and which thereby renders them useless to the earth.

But, not only ought you to appear here as suppliants, and in a spirit of prayer, since it is here that the Lord dealeth out his favours and his grace, as it is here, likewise, that every thing renews the remembrance of those already received; you ought also to bring here a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving, see-

ing that, whichever way you turn your eyes, every thing recalls to you the remembrance of God's blessings, and the sight of his eternal mercies upon your soul.

And, in the first place, it is here, that in the sacrament by which we are regenerated, you have become believers: it is here that the goodness of God, in associating you, through baptism, with the hope of Jesus Christ, hath distinguished you from so many heathens who know him not: it is here that you have engaged your faith to the Lord; your written promises are still preserved under the altar. Here is the book of the covenant which you have made with the God of your fathers; and here ought you no longer to appear, but to ratify the engagements of your baptism, and to thank the Lord for the inestimable blessing which hath associated you with his people, and honoured you with the name of Christian; you ought to feel all the tenderness and respect of a child, for the blessed womb which hath brought you forth in Jesus Christ, and the glory of this House ought to be your glory.

In what light then ought you to be regarded, when, instead of bringing your thanksgivings to the foot of the altar for so singular and so distinguished a blessing, you dishonour it by your irreverence? You are an unnatural child, who profane the place of your birth according to faith; a perfidious Christian, for you come here to retract your promises before the very altars which witnessed them; to break the treaty on the sacred spot where it was concluded; to blot yourself out of the book of life, where your name was written with those of the faithful; to abjure the religion of Jesus

Christ on the very fonts where you had received it; to make a pompous display of all the vanities of the age, at the foot of the altar where you had solemnly renounced them; and to make a profession of worldliness where you had formerly made a profession of Christianity.

Nor is this all; for, in the second place, it is here that Jesus Christ hath so often said to you, through the mouth of his ministers, "My son, thy sins are "forgiven thee; go, and sin no more, lest a worse "thing befall thee." It is here, that, melting in tears, you have so often said to him, "Father, I have sin-"ned against heaven, and before thee." Now, my brethren, on the very spot where you have so often experienced the grace of forgiveness, not only do you forget the blessing, but you give new subjects of offence; on the very spot where you have so often appeared penitent, you proclaim yourselves still worldly and profane. Alas! Far from coming to these holy tribunals to recount the disorders of your past life; far from coming to renew those promises of penitence, those sentiments of compunction, those emotions of shame and of confusion, of which they have so often been the depositories; you boldly appear before them with an unblushing countenance, your eyes wandering here and there, full, perhaps, of guilt and adultery, (to use the expression of the apostle) to renew in their presence the same infidelities that your tears had once expiated, and to render them ocular witnesses of the same prevarications, of which they had been the secret confidants and the blessed remedies.

Again, In the third place, the temple of God is the house of doctrine and of truth; and it is here that, through the mouth of her pastors, the church announces to you the maxims of salvation, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, concealed from so many infidel nations. This which ought to be a fresh motive of gratitude on your part, is alas! rather a fresh subject of condemnation; and, even here, where, from these Christian pulpits, you are continually told on the part of Jesus Christ, that the unclean shall never enjoy the kingdom of heaven, you form profane desires; even here, where you are warned that you shall, one day, have to render account of every idle word, do you permit yourselves criminal ones: Lastly, even here, where you are so often told, that evil will befall him that scandalizeth, you become yourself a stumbling-block, and a subject of scandal. Why also my brethren do you believe that the word of the gospel, which we preach to princes and to the grandees of the earth, is now become as a tinkling brass, and our ministry almost unnecessary? It may be that our private faults place a bar to the fruit, and to the progress of the gospel, and that God blesseth not a ministry, the ministers of which are displeasing in his sight: But, independent of this reason, so humiliating for us, and which we cannot, however, either dissemble from you, or even conceal from ourselves; it is, doubtless, the profanation of the temples of God, and the indecent and disrespectful manner in which you listen to us, that deprive the word, of which we are the ministers, of all its energy and virtue. The Lord, estranged from this holy place through your profanations, no

longer giveth increase to our toils, nor sheddeth his grace, which alone causeth his doctrine and his word to fructify: He no longer looketh upon these assemblies, formerly so holy, but as an assembly of the worldly minded, of the voluptuous, the ambitious, and the profane. And how would you that he turn not his countenance from them, and that the word of his gospel fructify there? Reconcile, in the first place, with him, by your homages, by your collected behaviour, and by your piety, these houses of religion and truth: then will he compensate for your deficiencies; then will he open your hearts to our instructions, and his word shall no longer return empty to him.

But a final reason, which renders your disrespect still more criminal and disgraceful to religion, is, that it is committed in the temple where you offer up, in one sense, with the priest, the awful sacrifice, to renew the oblation of the cross, and to present to God the blood of his Son as the propitiation of your sins. Now, my brethren, while mysteries so august are celebrating; during those awful moments when heaven opens above our altars; at a period when the great business of your salvation is agitated; while the blood of the Lamb is flowing upon the altar to wash you from stain; while the angels of heaven tremble and adore; while the solemnity of the ministers, the majesty of the ceremonies, and even the piety of the true believers, all inspire fear, gratitude, and respect, scarcely do you bow the knee, scarcely do you cast a look upon the holy altar, where mysteries of so much importance to you are consummating; it is even with reluctance that you enter the church; you measure the

fatiguing length of the salutary sacrifice; you count the moments of a period so precious to the earth, and so replete with wonders and grace for men. You who are so embarrassed with your time, who lose it in a continual round of idleness, and who know not how to employ it; you complain of the pious solemnity of the minister, and of the care with which he treats this holy business? You require the utmost respect and precaution from those who serve you; and yet you wish that a priest clothed in all his dignity, representing Jesus Christ, and performing his office of mediator and high-priest with his Father, should treat the holy mysteries with carelessness, and dishonour the presence of the God whom he serves, and whom he immolates, by a shameful levityand haste? On what times, O my God, are we fallen? And was it to be expected that thy most precious and most signal favours should become a burden to the Christians of our age?

Alas! the first believers, who met in the temple of God at stated hours of the day, to join with their pastor in celebrating by hymns and songs the praises of the Lord, they seldom quitted those sacred abodes, and that only with regret, when obliged to attend to the affairs of the age, and to the duties of their station. How beautiful, my brethren, must have been the sight of that holy assembly of believers in the house of prayer, each in the place adapted to his station; on one side, the recluse, the holy confessors, and the great body of believers; on the other, the virgins, the widows, the married women, all attentive to the holy mysteries, all beholding with tears of joy and of religion, the blood still flowing, as I may say, of the Lamb, so lately cru-

cified before their eyes; praying for their princes, for the Cesars, for their persecutors, for their brethren, mutually exhorting each other to martyrdom, tasting all the consolation of the divine writings explained by their holy pastors, and seeing exhibited in the church of the earth, the joy, the peace, the innocence, and the profound meditation of the heavenly church! How beautiful and splendid were then the tents of Jacob, although the church was yet under oppression and obscurity; and the enemies of faith, even the prophets of the idols, in viewing their good order, their innocence, and their majesty, with what difficulty did they refuse to them their admiration and their homage! Alas! the fleeting moments which you now consecrate to religion, and which ought to sanctify the remainder of the day, often become themselves the source of the greatest guilt.

Lastly, my brethren, to all these inward dispositions of prayer, of adoration, and of gratitude, which the sanctity of our churches exacts of you, there is likewise to be added the external modesty, and decency of ornaments and dress: similar to the state of the blessed in the heavenly temple: but on this part I shall be very brief.

Women of the world! (for to you this part of my discourse is principally applicable) why is instruction necessary to you on this point? What good purpose do you attain by the display not only of ostentation and vanity, but of immodesty and impudence, with which you make your appearance in this house of tears and of prayer? Do you come here to dispute with Jesus Christ, the looks and the homage of those

who worship him? Do you come to insult the mysteries which operate the salvation of believers, by seeking to corrupt their heart at the feet even of the altars, where these mysteries take place for their benefit? Are you determined that innocence shall in no place of the earth, not even in the temple of God, that asylum of religion and piety, be protected from your profane and lascivious nakedness? Does not the world sufficiently furnish you with impure theatres, with assemblies of dissipation, where you may make a boast of being a stumbling-block to your brethren? Are not your own houses, open as they are to dissipation and to riot, sufficient to enable you to figure with an indecency which would formerly have been suitable only to houses of debauchery and of guilt, and which is the cause of the loss of that respect for the female character for which the nation hath always been so celebrated? For modesty alone is estimable, as St. Paul formerly instructed believers. Must the holy temple be also stained by your immodesties? Ah! when you appear before your earthly sovereign, you mark, by the dignity and propriety of your deportment, the respect which you know to be due to his presence; and, before the Sovereign of heaven and earth, you make your appearance, not only without proper preparation, but even without decency or modesty; and you display under his eyes an effrontery, which wounds even the eyes of the wise and respectable! You disturb the attention of the believers who had expected to have found here a place of peace and silence, and an asylum against all the objects of vanity; you disturb even the deep meditation and the holy gravity of the

ministers, and offend, by the indecency of your dress, the purity of their attention to holy things.

Thus the apostle desired, that Christian women should be covered with a veil in the temple, on account of the angels, that is of the priests, who are there continually present before God, and whose innocence and purity ought to equal that of the heavenly spirits. True it is, that thou thereby warnest us, O my God, what ought to be the holy gravity, and the inviolable self-possession of the ministers of thy temple; that it is for us to bear, stamped upon our countenance, the holy dread of the mysteries which we offer up, and the lively and intimate sense of thy presence; that it is for us to inspire the people around us in this place with respect, by the appearance of our modesty alone; that it becomes us not to appear at the altar, more wearied, more careless, and more in haste than even the assisting multitude; and not to authorize their irreverences by our own. For, O God! the desolation of the holy place hath commenced with the sanctuary itself; the respect of the people for it hath become weakened only in consequence of its being no longer supported by the holy gravity of the worship, and the majesty of the ceremonies; and thy house hath begun to be a house of dissipation and scandal, only since thy ministers have made of it a house of traffic, of weariness, and of avarice. But our examples, my brethren, in authorizing your profanations, do not excuse them.

It seems indeed, as if God had never left them unpunished. The shameful indecencies of the children of Eli, which had so long profaned his house, were

followed with the most dismal calamities: the holy ark became a prey to the Philistines; it was placed at the side of Dagon, in an infamous temple; the glory of Israel was blasted; the Lord withdrew himself from amidst his people; the lamp of Judah was extinguished; there was no high-priest, and Jacob found himself suddenly deprived of an altar and sacrifice.

There is little doubt, my brethren, but that the miseries of the last age have been the fatal consequences of the profanations and of the irreverences of our fathers. It was fit that the Lord should abandon temples where he had so long been insulted Tremble, my brethren, lest by imitating, the disorders of those who have preceded us, we prepare for our posterity the same calamities. Tremble, lest an irritated God should one day abandon these temples which we profane, and lest they, in their turn, become the asylum of error. How do we know but that he is already preparing all these evils for us, in permitting the purity and the simplicity of faith to be adulterated, in multiplying that race of men so wise in their own conceit, and so numerous in this age, who measure every thing by the lights of weak reason, who wish to fathom the secrets of God, and who, far from making religion the subject of their worship and thanksgivings, make it the subject of their doubts and of their censures? Thou art terrible in thy judgments, O God! and thy punishments are sometimes the more rigorous, as they have been tardy and slow.

Let us reflect then, my brethren, on all these great motives of religion; let us bring into this holy place a tender and attentive piety, a spirit of prayer, of com-

punction, of self knowledge, of thanksgiving, of adoration, and of praise; let us never quit our churches without bearing from them some new grace, since here is the throne of mercy from whence they are shed upon men; let us never quit them without an additional relish for heaven, without feeling new desires for the termination of our errors, and of attaching ourselves to God alone; without envying the happiness of those who serve him, who have it in their power to be continually worshipping him at the feet of the altar, and whose station and functions particularly consecrate them to this holy ministry. Say to him, as the queen of Sheba formerly said to Solomon, "Happy "are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which "stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wis- "dom." And, should the duties of your station not permit you to come here to worship the Lord at the different hours of the day, when his ministers assemble to praise him; ah! turn, at least continually towards the holy place, like the Israelites formerly, your longings and your desires. May the temple of God be the sweetest consolation of your troubles, the only asylum of your afflictions, the resource of your wants, the most certain relaxation from the pains, the fatiguing attentions, and the slavery of the world: in a word, may you find there the commencement of that unalterable peace, the plenitude and the consummation of which you will enjoy only with the blessed, in the eternal temple of the heavenly Jerusalem.

SERMON XXII.

THE TRUTH OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW viii. 10.

Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.

HOW are we to account for the incredulity manifested by the Jews with which they were reproached by our Saviour, and what cause could they still have for doubting the sanctity of his doctrine and the truth of his ministry? They had asked for miracles, and, before their eyes, he had wrought miracles so convincing, that no person before him had done the like. They had wished that his mission were authorized by testimonies; Moses and the prophets had amply borne testimony to him; the precursor had openly proclaimed, Behold the Christ and the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; a Gentile renders glory in our gospel to his almighty power; the heavenly Father had declared from on high, that it was his well-beloved Son; and lastly, the demons themselves, struck with his sanctity, quitted the bodies in which they were confi-

ned, confessing that he was the Holy, and the Son of the living God. What could the incredulity of the Jews still find to oppose to so many proofs and prodigies?

This question, my brethren, might with much greater reason be asked of those unbelieving minds, who, after the fulfilment of all that had been foretold, after the consummation of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the exaltation of his name, the manifestation of his gifts, the calling of his people, the destruction of idols, the conversion of Cesars, and the agreement of the universe, still doubt, and take upon themselves to confute and to overthrow what the toils of apostolic men, the blood of so many martyrs, the prodigies of so many servants of Jesus Christ, the writings of so many great men, the austerities of so many holy anchorites, and the religion of seventeen hundred years, have so universally and so divinely established in the mind of almost all people.

For, my brethren, amid all the triumphs of faith, there still secretly exist among us children of unbelief, whom God hath delivered up to the vanity of their own thoughts, and who blaspheme what they know not; impious men, who change, as the apostle says, the grace of our God into wantonness, sully their flesh, contemn all rule, blaspheme majesty, defile all their paths like animals not gifted with reason, and are set apart to serve one day as an example of the awful judgments of God upon men.

Now if, among so many believers whom religion brings together in this place any souls of this description should happen to be, allow me, my brethren, you

who preserve with respect the sacred trust of the doctrine which you have received from your ancestors and from your pastors, to seize this opportunity, either of undeceiving them, or of overcoming their incredulity. Allow me, for once, to do in this place what the first pastors of the church so often did before their assembled people, that is to say, to take upon myself the defence of the religion of Jesus Christ against unbelief; and, before entering into the particulars of your duties during this long term, allow me to begin by laying the first foundations of faith. It is so consoling for those who believe, to find how reasonable their submission is, and to be convinced that faith, which is apparently the stumbling block of reason, is, however, its only consolation, guide, and refuge!

This then is my whole design. The unbeliever refuses submission to revealed truths, either through a vain affectation of reason, or through a false sentiment of pride, or through an ill-placed love of independence. Now, my object in the present discourse is to shew, that the submission which the unbeliever refuses, through a vain affectation of reason, is the most rational use which he can make even of reason; that the submission which he refuses through a false sentiment of pride, is the most glorious proof of true pride; and, lastly, that the submission which he rejects through an ill-placed love of independence, indispensably requires the sacrifice of it. And from thence I shall draw the three great features of religion: It is reasonable, it is honourable to us, it is necessary.

O my Saviour, eternal author and finisher of our faith, defend thyself, thy own doctrine. Suffer not thy cross,

by which the universe hath been subdued to thee, to be still the ridicule and scandal of proud minds. Triumph once more, through the secret wonders of thy grace, over that same unbelief over which thou didst formerly triumph through the striking operation of thy power; and by those lively proofs, which enlighten hearts, more efficacious than all our discourses, destroy every sentiment of pride which may still rise up against the knowledge of thy mysteries.

PART I. I admit at the outset that it is faith, and not reason, which makes Christians; and that the first step exacted of a disciple of Jesus Christ, is to surrender up his mind, and to believe what he may not comprehend. Nevertheless, I say, that we are led to that submission by reason itself; that the more even our lights are superior, the more do they point out the necessity of our submission; and that unbelief, far from being the choice of strong and reasonable minds, is, on the contrary, that of error and weakness.

In faith, reason hath therefore its uses, as it hath its limits: and as the law, good and holy in itself, served, however, only to conduct to Jesus Christ, and there stopped as at its boundary; in the same way reason, good and just in itself, since it is the gift of God, and an emanation from the sovereign mind, ought only to serve, and is given to us only for the purpose of preparing the way for faith. It is rash and indiscreet, and quits the bounds of its first institution, when it attempts to go beyond these sacred limits.

This being admitted, let us see which of the two, the believer or the unbeliever, makes the most rational use of his reason. Submission to things held out to

our belief, may be suspected of credulity, either on account of the authority by which they are supported; to which, if it be trifling, it is a proof of weakness to give credit: or on account of the things which we are persuaded to believe; which if they be in opposition to the principles of equity, of honour, of society, or of conscience, it is a proof of ignorance to believe: or, lastly, on account of the motives which are employed to persuade us; by which if they be vain, frivolous, or incapable of determining a wise mind, it is imprudent to be overcome. Now, it is easy to prove that the authority which exacts the submission of the Christian believer, is the greatest, the most respectable, and the best established on earth; that the truths proposed to his belief are the only ones conformable to the principles of equity, of honour, of society, and of conscience; and lastly, that the motives employed to persuade him are the most decisive, the most triumphant, and the most proper to gain submission from the least credulous minds.

When I speak however of the authority of the Christian religion, I do not pretend to confine the meaning of that term to the authority of its holy assemblies, in which, through the mouths of its pastors, the church utters its decisions, and holds out to all believers the infallible rules of worship and doctrine. As it is not heresy, but unbelief, which this discourse concerns, I do not mean in this place to treat of religion as opposed to the sects which the spirit of error hath separated from one into many, that is to say, I shall not speak of her as confined to the catholic church alone, but as forming, since the beginning of the world, a society

apart, the sole depository of the knowledge of a God, and of the promise of a Mediator, constantly opposed to all the religions which have since arisen in the universe; always attacked, and always the same; and, I say, that its authority bears with it such shining marks of truth, that it is impossible, without folly, to refuse submission to it.

In the first place, in matters of religion, antiquity is a character to which reason pays respect; and it may be said, that a prepossession is already formed in favour of a belief, consecrated by the religion of the first men, and by the simplicity of the primitive times. Not but that falsehood is often decked out with the same titles, and that there exist among men, ancient errors which seem to dispute with truth the antiquity of their origin; but it is not difficult, to whoever wishes to trace their history, to go back even to their origin. Novelty is the constant and most inseparable feature of error; and the reproach of the prophet may alike be made to all: "They sacrifice to new gods that come "newly up, whom their fathers feared not."

If there be indeed a true religion upon the earth, it must be that which is most ancient; for, if there be a true religion upon the earth, it must be the first and most essential duty of man towards the God who wishes to be honoured by it. This duty must therefore be equally ancient with man; and, as it is attached to his nature, it must, if I may so speak, be born with him. And this, my brethren, is the first feature by which the religion of Christians is at once distinguished from superstitions and sects. It is the most ancient religion in the world. The first men, before an impi-

ous worship had carved its divinities out of wood and stone, adored the same God whom we adore, raised up altars and offered sacrifices to him, expected from his liberality the reward of their virtue, and from his justice the punishment of their disobedience. The history of the birth of this religion, is the history of the birth of the world itself. The divine books which have preserved it down to us, contain the first monuments of the origin of things. They are themselves more ancient than those fabulous productions of the human mind, which afterwards so miserably amused the credulity of succeeding ages; and as error ever springs from the truth, and is only a faulty imitation of it, all the fables of paganism are founded on some of the principal features of that divine history; in so much, that it may be affirmed that every thing, to error itself, renders homage to the antiquity and to the authority of our holy scriptures.

Now, my brethren, do you not already find something respectable in this feature alone? Other religions, which have vaunted a more ancient origin, have produced nothing, in support of their antiquity, but fabulous legends, which sunk into nothing of themselves. They have disfigured the history of the world by a chaos of innumerable and imaginary ages, of which no memorial remains to posterity, and which the history of the world hath never known. The authors of these gross fictions did not write till many ages after the actions which they relate, and it is saying every thing to add, that their theology was the fruit of poesy; and the inventions of that art, the most solid foundations of their religion.

In our religion we find a train of facts, reasonable, natural, and agreeing in all its parts. It is the history of a family continued from its first head down to him who writes it, and authenticated in all its circumstances. It is a genealogy in which every chief is characterised by his own actions, by events which occurred in his own times, by marks which were still known in the places where the writers had dwelt. It is a living tradition, the most authenticated upon the earth, since Moses hath written only what he had heard from the children of the patriarchs, and they related only what their fathers had seen. Every part of it is coherent, hangs properly together, and tends to clear up the whole. The features are not copied, nor the adventures drawn from elsewhere, and accommodated to the subject. Before Moses, the people of God had nothing in writing. He hath left nothing to posterity but what he had verbally collected from his ancestors, that is to say, the whole tradition of mankind; and was the first who collected into a volume, the history of God's wonders and of his manifestations to men, the remembrance of which had till then composed the whole religion, the whole knowledge, and the whole consolation of the family of Abraham. The candour and sincerity of this author appear in the simplicity of his history. He takes no precaution to secure belief, because he supposes that those for whom he writes require no effort to make them believe; and he relates only facts well known among them, more for the purpose of preserving them to their posterity, than for any instruction to themselves.

You may now my brethren, perceive the reason why the Christian religion acquires influence over the mind of men. Look on all sides, read the history of every people and of every nation, and you will find nothing so well established upon the earth: I go further, you will find nothing more worthy the attention of a rational mind. If men be born for a religion, they are born for this one alone. If there be a Supreme Being who hath manifested the truth to men, this only is worthy of men and of him. Every where else the origin is fabulous; here it is equally certain with the rest; and the events of succeeding ages, which cannot be disputed, are, however, only proofs of the authenticity of the first. Therefore, if there be any authority upon the earth to which reason ought to yield, it is to that of the Christian religion.

To its character of antiquity must be added that of perpetuity. Figure to yourselves that endless variety of sects and religions which have successively reigned upon the earth: Follow the history of the superstitions of every people and of every country; you will find that they have flourished a few years, and afterwards sunk into oblivion along with the power of their followers. Where are the gods of Emath, of Arphad, and of Sepharvaim? Call to mind the history of the first conquerors: In vanquishing the people, they vanquished the gods of the people; and, in overturning their power, they overturned their worship. How beautiful, my brethren, to see the religion of our fathers alone maintaining itself from the first, surviving all other creeds, and, notwithstanding the various fortunes of those who have professed it, alone passing

from father to son, and braving every exertion to efface it from the heart of men! It is not the arm of flesh which hath preserved it. No! The people of God hath, almost always, been weak, oppressed, and persecuted. No; "it is not," says the prophet, "by their "own sword that our fathers got the land in posses- "sion; but thy right hand, O Lord, and thine arm, "and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst "a favour unto them." At one time slaves, at another fugitives, and afterwards tributaries of various nations; they saw a thousand times Chaldea, Assyria, Babylon, the most formidable powers of the earth, the whole universe conspire their ruin, and the total extinction of their worship; but this weak and feeble people oppressed in Egypt, wandering in the desart, and afterwards carried in captivity into a foreign land, hath never been exterminated, while so many others, more powerful, have followed the destiny of all human things; and its worship hath always subsisted with itself, in spite of the efforts made by almost every age to destroy it.

Now, my brethren, whence comes it, that a worship so much opposed, so arduous in its observances, so rigorous in its punishments upon transgressors, and even so liable to decay or to be overthrown, through the mere inconstancy and ignorance of the people who were its first depository; whence comes it that this worship alone hath been perpetuated amid so many revolutions, while the superstitions supported by all the power of empires and of kingdoms, have sunk into their original oblivion? Ah! is it not God, who hath done all these things? Is it not the arm of the Almigh-

ty which hath preserved his work? And since every thing invented by the human mind has perished, is it not to be inferred, that what hath always endured was alone the work of the divine wisdom?

Lastly, If to its antiquity and to its perpetuity, you add its uniformity, no pretext for resistance will be left to reason. For, my brethren, every thing changes upon earth, because every thing follows the mutability of its origin. Occasional events, the difference of ages, the opposite effects of climate, and the necessity of the times, have introduced a thousand changes in all human laws. Faith alone hath never changed. Such as our fathers received it, such have we it at present, and such shall our descendants one day receive it. I admit that it hath been only gradually developed in the course of ages, and by the necessity of securing it from the errors which have been attempted to be introduced into it; but every thing which once appeared to belong to it, hath always appeared as appertaining to it. It is no doubt easy to prolong the existence of a religion, when accommodated to times and to conjunctures, and when additions or diminutions may be made according to the fancy of the age, and of those who govern: but never to relax, in spite of the change of manners and of times; to see every thing change around, and yet be always the same, is the great privilege of the Christian religion. And by these three features, of antiquity, of perpetuity, and of uniformity, which exclusively belong to it, its authority is the only one upon the earth capable of determining a wise mind.

But if the submission of the believer be reasonable on account of the authority by which it is supported, it is not less so on account of the things which are held out to his belief. And here, my brethren, let us enter into the foundation of the Christian worship. It is not afraid of investigation, like those abominable mysteries of idolatry, the infamy and horror of which were concealed by the darkest obscurity. A religion, says Tertullian, which shuns examination, and dreads being searched into, ought always be suspected. The more the Christian worship is investigated, the more beauties and hidden wonders will be found in it. Idolatry inspired men with foolish sentiments of the Divinity; philosophy, with very unreasonable ideas of himself; cupidity with iniquitous feelings towards the rest of men. Now, admire the wisdom of religion, which remedies these three evils, which the reason of all ages had never been able either to eradicate, or even to understand.

And, in the first place, What other legislator hath spoken of the divinity, like that of the Christians? Where else do you find more sublime ideas of his power, of his immensity, of his wisdom, of his grandeur, and of his justice, than those which are given us in our scriptures. If there be above all a supreme and eternal Being, in whom all things live, he must be such as the Christian religion represents him. We alone compare him not to the likeness of man. We alone worship him seated above the cherubims, filling all space with his presence, regulating all by his wisdom, creating light and darkness, the author of good, and punisher of vice. We alone honour him as he

wishes to be honoured; that it is to say, we make not the worship due to him, to consist in the multitude of victims, nor in the external pomp of our homage; but in adoration, in love, in praise, and in thanksgiving. We ascribe to him the good which is in us, as to its principle; and we always attribute vice to ourselves, which takes its rise only in our corruption. We hope to receive from his hands the reward of a fidelity, which is the gift of his grace, and the punishment of transgressions, which are always the consequence of the bad use which we make of our liberty. Now, what ideas can be more worthy of the Supreme Being than these!

In the second place the vanity of philosophers had either degraded man to the level of the beast, by placing his felicity in the senses, or foolishly exalted him even to the likeness of God, by persuading him that he might find his own happiness in his own wisdom. Now, the Christian morality avoids these two extremes: it withdraws man from carnal pleasures, by making known to him the excellency of his nature, and the holiness of his destination; and it corrects his pride, by making him sensible of his own misery and lowliness.

Lastly, Cupidity rendered man unjust towards the rest of men. Now, what other doctrine than that of Christians, hath ever so well regulated our duties on this head. It instructs us to yield obedience to established power, as if it derived its source from God, not only through the fear of authority, but through an obligation of conscience; to respect our superiors, to bear with our equals, to be affable towards our inferiors, to

love all men as ourselves. The Christian religion is alone capable of forming good citizens, faithful subjects, patient servants, lenient masters, incorruptible magistrates, clement princes, and zealous friends. Christianity alone renders the honour of marriage inviolable, secures the peace of families, and maintains the tranquillity of states. It not only checks usurpation, but it prohibits even the desire of others property; it not only forbids our looking with an envious eye on the prosperity of our brother, but it commands us to share our own riches with him, if need require; it not only forbids us to attempt his life, but it requires us to do good, even to those who injure us; to bless those who curse us, and to be all of one heart only and one mind. Give me, said St. Augustin of old to the heathens of his time, a kingdom composed altogether of people of this kind: Good God! what peace, and what felicity! What an image of heaven upon earth! Have all the ideas of philosophy ever borne a resemblance to the plan of this heavenly republic? And is it not true, that if a God hath spoken to men in order to lay open to them the ways of salvation, he could not have held different language?

To all these maxims, so worthy of reason, it is true that religion adds mysteries which exceed our comprehension. But, besides that good sense should induce us to yield on this point to a religion so venerable through its antiquity, so divine in its morality, so superior to every thing on earth in its authority, and alone worthy of being believed, the motives it employs for our persuasion are sufficient to conquer unbelief.

In the first place, These mysteries were foretold

many ages before their accomplishment, and foretold with every circumstance of time and place; nor were they vague prophecies suited only to the credulity of the vulgar, uttered in a corner of the earth, of the same period with the events, and unknown to the rest of the universe. They are prophecies which, from the beginning of the world, have constituted the religion of an entire people; which fathers transmitted to their children as their most precious inheritance; which were preserved in the holy temple as the most sacred pledge of the divine promises; and, lastly, prophecies to the truth of which the nation most inveterate against Jesus Christ, and their first depositary, still bears witness in the face of the whole universe; prophecies, which were not mysteriously hidden from the people, lest their falsehood should be discovered, like the vain oracles of the Sybils, which were carefully shut up in the capitol, fabricated to support the Roman pride, exposed to the view of the pontiffs alone, and produced, piece-meal, from time to time, to authorise, in the mind of the people, either a dangerous enterprise, or an unjust war. On the contrary, our prophetical books were the daily study of a whole people. The young and the old, women and children, priests and laity, princes and subjects, were indispensably obliged to have them continually in their hands; every one was entitled to study his duties there, and to discover his hopes. Far from flattering their pride, they told them only of the ingratitude of their fathers; in every page they denounced misfortunes to them as the just punishment of their crimes; they reproached kings with their dissipation, pontiffs with their profusion,

and the people with their inconstancy and unbelief; these holy books were nevertheless dear to them, and, from the oracles which they then saw continually accomplishing, they awaited with confidence the fulfilment of those which the whole universe hath now witnessed. Now, the knowledge of the future is the most unquestionable attribute of the divinity.

2dly, These mysteries are founded upon facts so evidently miraculous, so well-known in Judea, so fully admitted at the time, even by those whose interest it was to reject them, so notorious by events which interested the whole nation, so often repeated in the cities, in the country, in the churches, and in the public places, that we must shut our eyes against the light when we presume to call them in question. The apostles have preached them, have written them, even in Judea, a very short time after their fulfilment; that is to say, at a period when the pontiffs, who had condemned Jesus Christ, were still living, and might so easily have controverted and proclaimed their imposture, had they really been a deception upon mankind. Jesus Christ, by fulfilling his promise of arising from the dead, confirmed his gospel, and it is not to be supposed, either that the apostles could be deceived on a fact so decisive and so essential for them, a fact so often foretold, and looked forward to, as the principal point on which all the rest was to turn, a fact so often confirmed, and that before so many witnesses; or that they themselves wished to deceive us, and to preach falsehood to men at the expence of their own ease, honour, and life, the only return which they had to expect for their imposture. Would these men, who have left

us only such pious and wise precepts, have given to the earth an example of folly hitherto unknown to every people, and, without view, interest, or motive, have coolly devoted themselves to the most excruciating torments, and to a death endured with the most heroical piety, merely to maintain the truth of a thing, of which they themselves knew the falsehood? Would these men have all submitted tranquilly to death for the sake of another man who had deceived them, and who, having failed in his promise of rising again from the grave, had only imposed, during life, upon their credulity and weakness? Let the impious man no longer reproach us with credulity, for the incomprehensible mysteries of faith. He must be very credulous himself, to be able to persuade himself of the possibility of suppositions so absurd.

Lastly, the whole universe hath been obedient to the faith of these mysteries; the Cesars, whom it degraded from the rank of gods; the philosophers, whom it convicted of ignorance and vanity; the voluptuous, to whom it preached self-denial and sufferance; the rich, to whom it taught poverty and humility; the poor, whom it commanded to love even their abject and indigent state; in a word, all mankind whose passions it combated. This faith, preached by twelve poor men, without learning, talents, or protection, hath subjected emperors, learned, illiterate, cities and empires; mysteries apparently so absurd, have overthrown all the sects, and all the monuments of proud reason, and the folly of the cross hath been wiser than all the wisdom of the age. The whole universe hath conspired against it, and every effort of its enemies,

hath only added fresh confirmation to it. To be a believer, and to be destined to death, were two things inseparable; yet the danger was only an additional charm; the more persecutions were violent, the more progress did faith make; and the blood of the martyrs was the seed of believers. O God! who doth not perceive thy finger here? Who, in these traits, would not acknowledge the character of thy work? Where is the reason which doth not feel the vanity of its doubts sink into nothing here, and which still blushes to submit to a doctrine, to which the whole universe hath yielded? Having shewn that this submission to revealed truth is reasonable, I shall now prove that it is honourable to men.

PART II. Pride is the secret source of unbelief. In that ostentation of reason, which induces the unbeliever to contemn the common belief, there is a deplorable singularity which flatters him, and occasions him to suppose in himself more vigour of mind and more light than in the rest of men, because he boldly ventures to cast off a yoke to which they have all submitted, and to stand up against what all the rest had hitherto been contented to worship.

Now, in order to deprive the unbeliever of so wretched a source of consolation, it is only necessary to demonstrate, in the first place, That nothing is more honourable to reason than faith; honourable on account of its promises for the future; honourable from the situation in which it places the believer in this world; and lastly, honourable from the great models which it holds out to his imitation.

I say in the first place, honourable to reason on ac-

count of the promises it holds out. What are the promises of faith, my brethren? The adoption of God, an eternal association with him, the complete redemption of our bodies, the eternal felicity of our souls, freedom from the passions, our hearts fixed by the possession of the true riches, our minds penetrated with the ineffable light of the sovereign reason, and happy in the clear and always durable view of the truth. Such are the promises of faith; it informs us that our origin is divine, and our hopes eternal.

Now, I ask, Is it disgraceful to reason to believe truths which do such honour to the immortality of its nature? What, my brethren, would it then be more honourable to a man to believe himself of the same nature as the beasts, and to look forward to the same end? What, would the unbeliever think himself more honoured by the conviction that he is only vile clay, which chance has put together, and which chance shall dissolve, without end, destination, hope, or any other use of his reason or of his body, than that of brutally plunging himself, like the beast, into carnal gratifications! What, would he have a higher opinion of himself, when viewed in the light of an unfortunate wretch, accidentally placed upon the earth, who looks forward to nothing beyond life, whose sweetest hope is that of sinking back to nothingness, who is related to nothing but himself, and is reduced to find his felicity in himself, though he can find there only anxieties and secret terrors! Is this, then, that miserable distinction by which the pride of unbelief is so much flattered? Great God! How glorious is it to thy truth, to have no enemies but men of this character! For my part,

as St. Ambrose formerly said to the unbelievers of his time, I glory in believing truths so honourable to man, and in expecting the fulfilment of promises so consolatory. To refuse belief to them, is miserably to punish one's self. Ah! if I be deceived, in preferring the hope of one day enjoying the eternal society of the righteous in the bosom of God, to the humbling belief of being of the same nature as the brute, it is an error dear to me, which I delight in, and upon which I wish never to be undeceived.

But, if faith be honourable on account of its promises for the future, it is not less so from the situation in which it places the believer in this world. And here, my brethren, figure to yourselves a truly righteous man, who lives by faith, and you will acknowledge that there is nothing on earth more sublime. Master of his desires and of all the movements of his heart; exercising a glorious empire over himself; enjoying his soul in patience and in equanimity, and regulating all his passions by the rein of temperance; humble in prosperity; firm under misfortunes; cheerful in tribulations; gentle with those who hate peace; insensible to injuries; feeling for the afflictions of those who trespass against him; faithful to his promises; strict in his friendships; unshaken in his duties; unaffected by riches, which he contemns; fatigued with honours, which he dreads; and greater than the world, which he considers only as a mass of earth—What dignity!

Philosophy destroyed one vice only to give birth to another. She pompously taught contempt of the world, merely to attract the applauses of the world, and sought more the glory of wisdom, than wisdom itself.

In destroying the other passions she continually erected upon their ruins, one much more dangerous; I mean pride: like that prince of Babylon who overthrew the altars of the gods, merely to exalt upon their wrecks his own impious statue, and that monstrous colossus of pride which he wished the whole earth to worship.

But faith exalts the righteous above even his virtue. Through it he is made still greater in the secret of his heart, and in the eyes of God, than before men. He forgives without pride; he is disinterested without shew; he suffers without wishing it to be known; he moderates his passions without perceiving it himself; he alone is ignorant of the glory and of the merit of his actions; far from looking with satisfaction upon himself, he is ashamed of his virtues much more than the sinner is of his vices; far from courting applause, he hides his works from the light, as if they were deeds of darkness; love of duty is the only source of his virtue; and he acts under the eyes of God alone, and as if there were no longer men upon the earth—with what dignity does he not appear! Find, if you can, any thing greater in the universe. Review all the various kinds of glory with which the world gratifies the vanity of men; and see, if, all together, they can bestow that degree of dignity to which the godly are raised by faith.

Now, my brethren, what can be more honourable to man than this situation? Do you consider him as more glorious, more respectable, or more great, when he follows the impulse of a brutal instinct; when he makes himself the slave of hatred, revenge, voluptuousness, ambition, envy, and all the other monsters which alternately reign in his heart?

For, are you who make a boast of unbelief thoroughly acquainted with the character of an unbeliever? He is a man without morals, probity, faith, or character, who owns no rule but his passions, no law but his iniquitous thoughts, no master but his desires, no check but the dread of authority, and no God but himself; he is an unnatural child, because he believes that chance alone hath given him fathers; a faithless friend, because he looks upon men, merely as the wretched fruits of a wild and fortuitous concurrence, to whom he is connected only by transitory ties; and a cruel master, because he is convinced that the strongest and the most fortunate have always reason on their side. For, who could henceforth place any dependence upon you? You no longer fear God; you no longer respect men; you look forward to nothing after this life; virtue and vice appear in your eyes merely as prejudices of education and the consequences of popular credulity. Adultery, revenge, blasphemy, the blackest treachery, abominations which I dare not even name, are in your opinion, only the subjects of human prohibitions, and of regulations established through the policy of legislators. According to you, the most horrible crimes, and the purest virtues, are equally the same, since an eternal annihilation shall soon equalise the just and the impious, and for ever confound them both in the dreary mansion of the tomb. What a monster must you then be! Does this representation of you gratify your pride, or on the contrary, do you not find the bare idea insupportable?

Besides, you pride yourself upon irreligion, as springing from your superiority of mind; but trace this

notion to its source. What hath led you to free-thinking? Is it not the corruption of your heart? Would you have ever thought of impiety had you been able to connect religion with your pleasures? You began to feel doubts with regard to a doctrine which incommoded your passions; and you have set it down as false from the moment that you found it irksome. You have anxiously sought to persuade yourself what you had such an interest to believe, that all died with us; that eternal punishments were merely the terrors of education; that inclinations born with us could never be crimes; and other maxims of free-thinking originating from hell. We are easily persuaded of what we wish. Solomon worshipped the gods of foreign women only to quiet himself in his debaucheries. If men had never had passions, or if religion had countenanced them, unbelief would never have appeared upon the earth. And a proof that what I say is true, is, that in the moments when you are disgusted with guilt, you imperceptibly turn towards religion; in the moments when your passions are more cool, your doubts diminish; you render, as if in spite of yourself, a secret homage at the bottom of your heart to the truth of faith; in vain do you try to weaken it, you cannot succeed in extinguishing it; at the first signal of death, you raise your eyes towards heaven, you acknowledge the God whose finger is upon you, you cast yourself upon the bosom of your Father, and the Author of your being, you tremble over a futurity which you had made a boast of not believing, and, humbled under the hand of the Almighty, on the point of falling upon and crushing you like a worm of the earth, you con-

fess that he alone is great, wise, and immortal, and that man is only a being of vanity and falsehood.

Lastly, If fresh proofs were necessary to my subject, I could prove to you how honourable faith is to man, on account of the great models which it holds out for our imitation. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, said formerly the Jews to their children. Remember the holy men who have gone before you, whose faith obtained them so honourable a testimony, said formerly St. Paul to the faithful, after having related to them, in that beautiful chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, their names, and the most wonderful circumstances of their history, from age to age.

Behold the excellency of the Christian faith. Recollect all the great men which, in every age, have submitted to it; princes so magnanimous, conquerors so religious, pastors so venerable, philosophers so enlightened, learned men so estimable, wits so much vaunted in their age, martyrs so noble, anchorites so penitent, virgins so pure and constant, heroes in every description of virtue. Philosophy preached a pompous wisdom; but its sage was no where to be found. To religion what a cloud of witnesses! What an uninterrupted tradition of Christian heroes from the blood of Abel down to our own times!

Now, I ask, Do you blush to tread in the steps of so many illustrious men? Place on one side all the great men whom, in every age, religion hath given to the world, and on the other, that small number of dark and desperate minds whom unbelief hath produced. Does it appear more honourable for you to rank yourself among the latter party, to adopt for your guides,

and your models, those men whose names are only remembered with horror, those monsters whom it hath pleased providence to permit nature to bring forth from time to time; or the Abrahams, the Josephs, the Moses', the Davids, the apostolic men, the righteous of ancient and of modern times? Bear, if you can, this comparison. Ah! said St. Jerome formerly, but on a different occasion, If you believe me in error, it is glorious for me to be deceived with such guides.

And here, my brethren, leaving unbelievers for a moment, allow me to address myself to you. Avowed unbelief is perhaps a rare vice among us; but the simplicity of faith is perhaps not less so. We feel a horror at quitting the belief of our fathers; but we wish to refine upon their faith. We do not permit ourselves to doubt upon the main part of the mysteries; but obedience is philosophically given, by imposing our own yoke, by weighing the holy truths, receiving some as reasonable, reasoning upon others, and measuring them by our own feeble lights; and our age, more than any other, is full of these half believers, who, under the pretext of taking away from religion all that credulity or prejudice may have added to it, deprive faith of the whole merit of submission.

Now, my brethren, sanctity ought never to be spoken of but with a religious circumspection. Faith is a virtue almost as delicate as modesty: a single doubt, a single word injures it; a breath, as I may say, tarnishes it. Yet, nevertheless, what licence is not allowed in modern conversation on all that is most respectable in the faith of our fathers? Alas! it was forbidden by the law, to the mouth of man, even to pro-

nounce the terrible name of the Lord; but in these times, all that is most sacred and most august in religion, is become a common subject of worldly conversation: every body talks over the subject, and freely decides upon it. Vain and superficial men, whose only knowledge of religion consists in a little more temerity than the illiterate and the vulgar, producing, as their whole stock of learning, some common-place and hackneyed doubts, which they have picked up, but never formed for themselves, doubts which have so often been cleared up, that they seem now to exist only to glorify the truth; men who, amid the most dissolute manners, have never devoted an hour of serious attention to the truth of religion, act the philosopher, and boldly decide upon points which a whole life of study, accompanied with learning and piety, could scarcely clear up.

Individuals even of a sex in which ignorance on certain points would be meritorious, or from whom good-breeding and politeness require at least an affectation of ignorance; persons who are better acquainted with the world than with Jesus Christ; and who have not even sufficient religion to regulate their manners, pretend to feel doubts, wish to have them explained, are afraid of believing too much, suspect every thing, yet have no doubts about their own miserable situation, and the visible impropriety of their life. O God! it is thus that thou deliverest up sinners to the vanity of their own fancies, and permittest that those who pretend to penetrate into thine adorable secrets know not themselves. Faith is therefore honourable to man; this has just been shewn to you: it now remains for me to prove that it is necessary to him.

PART III. Of all the qualities of faith, the necessity of it is the one which renders the unbeliever most inexcusable. All the other motives which are employed to lead him to the truth, are foreign, as I may say, to him; this one is drawn from his own mind, I mean, from the nature itself of his reason.

Now, I say that faith is absolutely necessary to man, in the gloomy and obscure paths of this life; for his reason is weak, and requires to be assisted; it is corrupt, and requires to be cured; it is changeable, and requires to be fixed. Now, faith alone is the aid which assists and enlightens it, the remedy which cures it, the bridle and the rule which retains and fixes it. Give me yet a moment of your attention; I shall not misemploy it.

I say, in the first place, that reason is weak, and requires assistance. Alas! my brethren, we know nothing, neither ourselves, nor what is external to us. We are totally ignorant how we have been formed, by what imperceptible progression our bodies have received arrangement and life, and what are the infinite springs, and the divine skill, which gave motion to the whole machine. "I cannot tell," said that illustrious mother, mentioned in the Maccabees, to her children, "how ye came into my womb; for I neither gave you "breath nor life, neither was it I that formed the "members of every one of you: but doubtless the "Creator of the world, who formed the generation of "man, and found out the beginning of all things, will "also, of his own mercy, give you breath and life "again, as ye now regard not your own selves for his "law's sake." Our body is itself a mystery, in which the human mind is lost and overwhelmed, and of which

the secrets will never be fathomed; for there is none but him alone who hath presided at its formation, who is capable of comprehending them.

The breath of the divinity which animates us, that portion of ourselves which renders us capable of loving and of knowing, is not less unknown to us: we are entirely ignorant how its desires, its fears, its hopes, are formed, and how it can receive its ideas and images. No one hath hitherto been able to comprehend how that spiritual being, so different in its nature from matter, could possibly have been united with it by such indissoluble ties, that the two substances now form but one whole, and the good and evil of the one become the good and evil of the other. We are a mystery therefore to ourselves, as St. Augustin formerly said; and we would find it difficult to discover the nature even of that vain curiosity which pries into every thing, or how it hath been formed in our soul.

In all around us we still find nothing but enigmas; we live as strangers upon the earth, and amid objects with which we are unacquainted. To man, nature is a sealed book; and the Creator in order it would seem, to confound human pride, hath been pleased to overspread the face of this abyss with an impenetrable obscurity.

Lift up thine eyes, O man! Consider those great luminaries suspended over thy head, and which float through those immense spaces in which thy reason is lost. Who, says Job, hath formed the sun, and given a name to the infinite multitude of stars? Comprehend, if thou canst, their nature, their use, their pro-

perties, their situation, their distance, their revolutions, the equality or the inequality of their movements. Our age hath penetrated a little into their obscurity, that is, it hath made conjectures somewhat better than those of former ages; but what are its discoveries, when compared to what we are still ignorant of?

Descend again to the earth, and explain if thou canst what it is that holds the winds captive in their prison; what regulates the course of the thunder and of the tempest; what is the appointed limit which checks the impetuosity of the waves of the ocean, and how the phenomena of its movements take place; explain the surprising effects of plants, of metals, and of the elements; find out in what manner gold is purified in the bowels of the earth; unravel, if thou canst, the infinite skill employed in the formation of the very insects which crawl before us; unfold the reason of the various instincts of animals: look on every side; nature in all her parts offers nothing but enigmas. O man! thou knowest nothing of the objects, even under thine eyes, and thou wouldst pretend to fathom the eternal depths of faith! Nature is a mystery to thee, and thou wouldst have a religion which had none! Thou art ignorant of the secrets of man, and thou wouldst pretend to know the secrets of God! Thou knowest not thyself, and thou wouldst yet pretend to fathom what is so much above thee! The universe, which God hath yielded up as the object of thy curiosity and the scene of thy contentions, is an abyss in which thou art lost; and yet thou desirest that the mysteries of faith, which he hath given to thee only for thy obedience and respect, should have

nothing which escapes thy feeble intellect!—O blindness! were every thing, excepting religion, clear and evident, then mightest thou with some shew of reason, mistrust its obscurities; but, since every thing around thee is a labyrinth in which thou art bewildered, the the secrets of God, as St. Augustin formerly said, ought to render thee more respectful and more attentive, instead of rendering thee more incredulous?

The necessity of faith is, therefore, founded, in the first place, upon the weakness of reason; but it is likewise founded upon its deep depravity. What indeed was more natural to man, than to acknowledge God as the author of his being and of his felicity, the end and principle of his life; to adore his wisdom, his power, his goodness, and all those divine perfections of which he hath engraved upon his work such profound and evident marks? These feelings were born with us. Nevertheless, review all those ages of darkness and superstition, which preceded the gospel, and see how far man had degraded his Creator, and to what he had likened his God. There was nothing so vile in the created world but his impiety erected into gods, and man was the noblest divinity worshipped by man.

If, from religion, you pass to morality, all the principles of natural equity were effaced, and man no longer bore written in his heart the work of that law which nature has engraven on it. Plato, the sage, who, according to St. Augustin, had so nearly approached to the truth, nevertheless, abolishes the holy institution of marriage; and, permitting a brutal confusion among men, names and paternal rights, which,

even in animals, nature hath so evidently respected; and peoples the earth with men uncertain of their origin, coming into the world without parents, as I may say, and consequently without ties, tenderness, affection, or humanity, and in a situation to become incestuous, or parricides, without even knowing it.

Others announced to mankind that pleasure was the sovereign good; and whatever might have been the intention of the first author of this sect, it is certain that his disciples sought no other felicity than that of brutes. The most shameful debaucheries became philosophical maxims. Rome, Athens, Corinth, beheld excesses, of which it may be said, that they rendered man no longer man. Even this is nothing; the most abominable vices were consecrated there: temples and altars were erected to them: lasciviousness, incest, cruelty, treachery, and other still more abandoned crimes, were made divinities of: worship became a source of public debauch and prostitution; the gods of crime, were suitably honoured by crimes; and the apostle, who relates this, takes care to inform us, that such was not merely the licentiousness of the people, but of sages and philosophers who had erred in the vanity of their own thoughts, and whom God had delivered up to the corruption of their heart.—O God! in permitting human reason to fall into such horrible errors, thou didst intend to let man know, that reason, when delivered up to its own darkness, is capable of every thing, and that it can never take upon itself to be its own guide, without plunging into abysses from which thy law and thy light are alone capable of withdrawing it.

Lastly, If the depravity of reason so evidently expose the necessity of a remedy to cure it, its eternal inconstancy and fluctuation, teach him the important lesson, that a check and a rule are absolutely requisite to fix it.

And here, my brethren, if the brevity of a discourse like this would permit me to enter into the subject, what vain disputes, what endless questions, what different opinions, have formerly engrossed all the schools of the heathen philosophy! And think not that it was upon matters which God seems to have yielded up to the contestation of men; it was upon the nature even of God, upon his existence, upon the immortality of the soul, upon the true felicity.

Some doubted the whole; others believed that they knew every thing. Some denied a God; others gave us one of their own fashioning, that is, a slothful, and indolent spectator of human things, and one who tranquilly leaves to chance the management of his own work, as a care unworthy of his greatness, and incompatible with his convenience: others made him the slave of fate, and subject to laws which he had no hand in imposing upon himself: others again incorporated with the whole universe, the soul of that vast body, and composing, as it were, a part of that world which is entirely his work. Many others of whom I know nothing, for I pretend not to recapitulate them all; but as many schools, so many were the sentiments upon so essential a point. So many ages, so many fresh absurdities were then upon the immortality and the nature of the soul: here, it was an assemblage of atoms; there, a subtile fire; in another place, a

minute and penetrating air; in another school, a portion of the divinity. Some made it to die with the body; others would have it to have existed before the body: some again made it to pass from one body to another; from man to the horse, from the condition of a reasonable being to that of animals without reason. There were some who taught that the true happiness of man is in the senses; a greater number placed it in reason; others again found it only in fame and glory; many in sloth and indolence. And what the most deplorable feature was, that the existence of God, his nature, the immortality of the soul, the destination and the happiness of men, all points so essential to his destiny, so decisive with regard to his eternal misery or happiness, became problems, destined merely to amuse the leisure of the schools and the vanity of the Sophists; idle questions, in which they were never interested for the principle of truth, but solely for the glory of coming off conqueror.—Great God! It is in this manner that thou sportest with human wisdom.

If from thence we enter into the Christian ages, who could enumerate that endless variety of sects which, in all times, hath broken the unity of faith, in order to follow strange doctrines? What were the abominations of the Gnosticks, the extravagant follies of the Valentinians, the fanaticism of Montanus, the contradictions of the Manicheans? Follow every age; as, in order to prove the righteous, it is necessary that there be heresies, so you will find that in every age the church hath always been miserably rent with them.

Recall to your remembrance the sad dissentions of

the age just past. Since the separation of our brethren, what a monstrous variety in their doctrine! What endless sects sprung from only one sect! What numberless divisions in one and the same schism!—O faith! O gift of God! O divine light with which darkness is cleared up, how necessary art thou to man! O infallible rule, sent from heaven, and given in trust to the church of Jesus Christ, always the same in all ages, always independent of places, of times, of nations, and of interests, how requisite it is that thou shouldest serve as a check upon the eternal fluctuations of the human mind! O pillar of fire, at the same time so obscure and so luminous, of what importance it is that thou shouldst always conduct the camp of the Lord, the tabernacle and the tents of Israel, through all the perils of the desart, the rocks, the temptations, and the dark and unknown paths of this life!

For you, my brethren, what instruction should we draw from this discourse, and what should I say to you in concluding? You say that you have faith; shew your faith by your works. What shall it avail you to have believed, if your manners have belied your belief? The gospel is yet more the religion of the heart than of the mind. That faith which makes Christians is not a simple submission of the reason; it is a pious tenderness of the soul; it is a continual longing to become like unto Jesus Christ; it is an indefatigable application in rooting out from ourselves whatever may be inimical to a life of faith. There is an unbelief of the heart, equally dangerous to salvation as that of the mind. A man who obstinately refuses belief, after all the proofs of religion, is a monster, whom we

contemplate with horror; but a Christian who believes, yet lives as though he believed not, is a madman, whose folly surpasseth comprehension: the one procures his own condemnation, like a desperate man; the other, like an indolent one, who tranquilly allows himself to be carried down by the waves, and thinks that he is thereby saving himself. Make your faith certain then, my brethren, by your good works; and if you shudder at the name alone of an impious person, feel the same horror at yourselves, seeing we are taught by faith, that the destiny of the wicked Christian shall not be different from his, and that his lot shall be the same as that of the unbeliever. Live conformably to what you believe. Such is the faith of the righteous, and the only one to which the eternal promises have been made.

SERMON XXIII.

DOUBTS UPON RELIGION.

JOHN vii. 27.

Howbeit we know this man, whence he is; but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.

SUCH is the great pretext opposed by the unbelieving Jews to the doctrine and ministry of Jesus Christ; doubts upon the truth of his mission. We know who thou art, and whence thou comest, said they to him; but the Christ whom we expect, when he cometh, we shall not know whence he is. It is far from clear then, that thou art the Messiah promised to our fathers; perhaps an evil spirit through thee, operates these wonders before our eyes, and imposes upon the credulity of the vulgar; so many deceivers have already appeared in Judea, who, giving themselves out for the Great Prophet who is to come, have seduced the people, and at last drawn down upon themselves the punishment due to their imposture. Keep us no longer in doubt: if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly, and in such a way as that no room shall henceforward be left either for doubt or for mistake.

I would not dare to speak thus in this place, my brethren, were the language of doubt not become so common now among us, that precaution is needless in undertaking to confute it, and we find in it the almost universal pretext employed by the world to authorise a criminal life. We every where meet with sinners who coolly tell us, that they would be converted were they well assured that all we tell them of religion were true; who hint that perhaps there is nothing after this life; that they have doubts and difficulties in regard to our mysteries, to which they can find no satisfactory answer; that, after all, every thing appears uncertain; and that, before engaging to follow all the rigid maxims of the gospel, it would be proper to be well assured that our toils shall not be lost.

Now, my intention on this occasion, is not to overthrow unbelief, by the great proofs which establish the truth of the Christian faith: independent of our having already established them, it is a subject far too extensive for a discourse, and often even beyond the capacity of the majority of those who listen to us; and it seems like paying too much deference to the frivolous objections of those who give themselves out as free-thinkers in the world, to employ the gravity of our ministry in refuting and overthrowing them.

We must take a shorter and more easy way, therefore, at present. My design is not to enter into the foundation of the proofs which render testimony to the truth of faith; I mean only to expose the falsity of unbelief: I mean to prove that the greatest part of those who call themselves unbelievers, are not so; that almost all those sinners who vaunt, and are con-

tinually alleging their doubts, as the only obstacle to their conversion, have actually none; and that, of all the pretexts employed as an excuse for not changing their mode of life, that of doubts upon religion, now the most common, is the least true and the least sincere.

It appears surprising at first, that I should undertake to prove to those who believe themselves to have doubts upon religion, and are continually bringing them forward, that they have actually none: nevertheless, with a proper knowledge of men, and, above all, with a proper attention to the character of those who make a boast of doubting, nothing is more easy than this conviction. I say an attention to their character, because they will always be found to possess licentiousness, ignorance, and vanity. These are the three usual sources of their doubts: they give the credit of them to unbelief, which has scarcely a share in them.

In the first place, Their licentiousness of manner induces them, apparently, to form doubts, which they dare not in reality entertain.

In the second place, Their ignorance adopts, without comprehending them.

Lastly, Their vanity boasts, without being able to succeed in drawing any resource from them.

I mean, that the greatest part of those who call themselves unbelievers, are licentious enough to wish to be so; too ignorant to be so in reality; and, nevertheless, sufficiently vain to wish to appear so. I propose to examine these three reflections, now become so important among us; and to overthrow licentiousness rather than unbelief, by laying it open to itself.

PART I. It must at once be admitted, my brethren, and it is melancholy for us that truth obliges us to confess it: it must be admitted, I say, that our age and those of our fathers have seen real unbelievers. In that depravity of manners in which we live, and amid all the scandals which have so long afflicted the church, it is not surprising that men have sometimes been found who have denied the existence of a God; and that faith, so much weakened in all, should, in some, be at last wholly extinguished. As chosen and extraordinary souls appear in every age, whom the Lord filleth with his grace, his lights, and his most shining gifts, and upon whom he delighteth in liberally pouring forth all the riches of his mercy; so, likewise, are seen others in whom iniquity is, as I may say, consummate; and whom the Lord seems to have marked out, to display in them the most terrible judgments of his justice, and the most fatal effects of his neglect and wrath.

The church, where all these scandals are to increase even to the end, cannot, therefore, boast of being entirely purged from the scandal of unbelief: she possesseth from time to time, stars which enlighten, and monsters who disfigure her; and, along with those great men, celebrated for their wisdom and for their sanctity, who in every age have served as her support and ornament, she hath also witnessed a race of impious men, whose names are even at the present period the horror of the universe, who have dared, in writings full of blasphemy and impiety, to attack the mysteries of God, to deny salvation and the promises made to our fathers, to overturn the foundation of faith, and to preach free-thinking among believers.

I do not pretend, therefore, to say, that, amid so many wretches who speak the language of unbelief among us, there may not perhaps be found some one sufficiently corrupt in mind and in heart, and so far abandoned by God, as actually and in effect to be an unbeliever: I mean only to prove that men steadfast in impiety are rare; and that, among all those who are continually vaunting their doubts and their unbelief, and make a deplorable ostentation of them, there is not perhaps a single one upon whose heart faith doth not still preserve its rights, and who doth not inwardly dread that God whom he apparently refuses to acknowledge. To overthrow, it is not always necessary to combat our pretended unbelievers; it would often be combating only phantoms: they require only to be pourtrayed such as they are: the wretched fabric of unbelief quickly tumbles down, and nothing remains but their passions and their debaucheries.

The first reason therefore, upon which I have established the general proposition, that the majority of those who make a boast of their doubts have actually none, is, that their doubts are those of licentiousness, and not of unbelief. Why, my brethren? Because it is licentiousness which hath formed their doubts, and not their doubts licentiousness; because that, in fact, it is to their passions and not to their doubts that they hold: and lastly, because in general, they attack in religion only those truths which are inimical to their passions. These reflections are, in my opinion, worthy of your attention; I shall lay them before you without ornament, and in the same order in which they presented themselves to my mind.

I say, in the first place, Their doubts have sprung from licentiousness, and not licentiousness from their doubts. Yes, my brethren, not one of all those who affect to profess themselves unbelievers has ever been seen to begin by doubting upon the truths of faith, and afterwards to fall from doubts into licentiousness: they begin with the passions; doubts come afterwards: they first give way to the irregularities of the age, and to the excesses of debauchery; and when they have attained a certain length, and find it no longer possible to retrace their steps, they then say, in order to quiet themselves, that there is nothing after this life; or, at least, they are well pleased to find people who say so. It is not, therefore, the little certainty they find in religion, which authorises their conclusion that we ought to yield ourselves up to pleasure, and that self-denial is needless, since every thing dies with us: it is the yielding of themselves up to pleasure which creates doubts upon religion, and, by rendering self-denial next to impossible, leads them to conclude, that, consequently, it is needless. Faith becomes suspected only when it begins to be troublesome; and, to this day, unbelief hath never made a voluptuary; but voluptuousness hath made almost all the unbelievers.

And as a proof of what I say, I appeal to you for whom this discourse is intended, whether while you lived with modesty and innocence, you ever doubted. Recollect those happy times when the passions had not yet corrupted your heart; the faith of your fathers had then nothing but what was august and respectable; reason bent without pain to the yoke of authority; you never thought of doubts or difficulties: from the

moment your manners changed, your views upon religion have no longer been the same. It is not faith, therefore, which hath found new difficulties in your reason; it is the practice of duties which hath encountered new obstacles in your heart. And, should you tell us, that your first impressions, so favourable to faith, sprung solely from the prejudices of education and of childhood; we shall answer, that the second, so favourable to impiety, have sprung solely from the prejudices of the passions and of debauchery; and that, prejudices for prejudices, it appears to us, that it is still better to keep by those which are formed in innocence and lead us to virtue, than to those which are born in the infamy of the passions, and preach up only free-thinking and guilt.

Thus nothing is more humiliating for unbelief than tracing it back to its origin: it bears the false names of learning and wisdom: but it is a child of iniquity and darkness. It is not the strength of reason which has led our pretended unbelievers to scepticism; it is the weakness of a corrupt heart, which has been unable to surmount its infamous passions; it is a proof of a mean cowardice, which, unable to support and to view with a steady eye the terrors and the threatenings of religion, endeavours to shake off their thoughts by continually repeating, that they are childish terrors; it resembles a man who, afraid of being alone at night, sings as he goes along, to support his spirits: debauchery always makes us cowardly and fearful; and it is nothing but an exceeding fear of eternal punishment, which occasions the sinner to be continually holding out that they are doubtful; he trembles, and wishes to strength-

en himself against himself; he cannot support, at the same time, the view of his crimes, and that of the punishment which awaits them; that faith, so venerable, and of which he speaks with such contempt, terrifies, however, and disquiets him still more than those other sinners, who, without doubting its punishments, are yet frequently not less unfaithful to its precepts: he is, in fine, like a coward, who hides his fear under a false ostentation of bravery. No, my brethren, our pretended free-thinkers give themselves out as men of courage and firmness; examine them narrowly, and they are the weakest and most cowardly of men.

Besides, it is not surprising that licentiousness should lead us to doubt of religion: the passions require the aid of unbelief; for they are too feeble and too unreasonable to maintain their own cause. Our understanding, our feelings, our conscience, all struggle within us against them: we are under the necessity, therefore, of seeking a support for them, and of defending them against ourselves: for, it is a matter of satisfaction, to justify to one's self whatever is pleasing. We would neither wish that passions which are dear to us should be criminal, nor that we should continually have to support the interests of our pleasures against those of our conscience: we wish to enjoy our crimes in tranquillity and to free ourselves from that troublesome monitor which continually espouses the cause of virtue against ourselves. While remorse disputes with us the pleasure of our enjoyments, they must be very imperfectly tasted: it is paying too great a price for guilt, to purchase it at the expence of that quiet which is sought in it: we must either terminate our debaucheries, or

try to quiet ourselves in them; and, as it is impossible to enjoy peace of mind in them, and next to impossible to terminate them, the only refuge seems that of doubting the truths which disquiet us; and, in order to attain to tranquillity, every effort is used to inculcate the persuasion of unbelief.

I mean that the great effort of licentiousness is that of leading us to the desire of unbelief: the horrible security of the unbeliever is coveted; total hardness of heart is regarded as a happy state; it is considered unfortunate to have been born with a weaker and more fearful conscience; the lot of those, apparently firm and unshaken in impiety, is envied; while they, in their turn, a prey perhaps to the most gloomy feelings of remorse, and vaunting a courage they are far from having, view our lot with envy; for, judging of us from the language we hold upon free-thinking, they take us for what we take them; that is to say, for what we are not, and for what both they and we would wish to be. And it is thus, O my God! that these false heroes of impiety live in a perpetual illusion, continually deceive themselves, and appear what they are not, only because they would wish to be it: they would willingly have religion to be but a dream: they say in their heart, "There is no God;" that is to say, this impious language is the desire of their heart: they ardently wish that there were no God; that a Being, so great and so necessary, were a chimera; that they were the sole masters of their own destiny; that they were accountable only to themselves for the horrors of their life and the infamy of their passions; that all finished with them; and that, beyond the

grave, there were no supreme and eternal Judge, the punisher of vice and the rewarder of virtue: this is their desire, they destroy as much as they can, through the impious wishes of their heart, but they cannot efface, from the foundation of their being, the idea of his power and the dread of his punishments.

In reality, it would be too vulgar for a man, vain and plunged in debauchery, to say in secret to himself: I am still too weak, and too much abandoned to pleasure, to quit it, or to lead a more regular and Christian life. That pretext would still leave him all his remorse: it is much sooner done to say to himself, It is needless to live otherwise, for there is nothing after this life. This pretext is far more convenient, for it puts an end to every thing; it is the most favourable to indolence, for it estranges us from the sacraments, and from all the other slaveries of religion. It is much shorter to say to himself, There is nothing, and to live as if he were indeed persuaded of it; it is at once throwing off every yoke and restraint; it puts an end to all the irksome measures which sinners of another description still keep with religion and their conscience. This pretext of unbelief, by persuading us that we actually doubt, leaves us in a certain state of indolence on every thing regarding religion, which prevents us from searching into ourselves, and from making melancholy reflections on our passions: we easily allow ourselves to be swept away by the fatal stream, upon the general prejudice that we believe nothing; we have few feelings of remorse, because we think ourselves unbelievers, and because that supposition leaves us almost the same security as impiety:

it is at least a diversion which dulls and suspends the sensibility of the conscience; and, by operating so as to make us always take ourselves for what we are not, it induces us to live as if we actually were what we wish to be.

That is to say, the greatest part of these pretended free-thinkers, and of these debauched and licentious unbelievers, ought to be considered as weak and dissolute men, who, not having the courage to live christianly, nor even the hardiness to be atheists, remain in that state of estrangement from religion, as the most convenient to indolence; and, as they never try to quit it, they fancy that they actually hold to it: they live in a kind of neutrality between faith and irreligion, contrived by indolence for its own ease; for it requires exertion to choose a side; and, in order to remain neuter, nothing more is required than not to think, and to live by habit; they therefore neither think deeply nor decide with resolution. Hardened and avowed impiety has something in it, which strikes with horror: religion, on the other hand, presents objects which alarm, and are by no means convenient to the passions. What is to be done between these two extremes, of which the one shocks reason, and the other the senses? They rest wavering and undecided; they enjoy in the mean time the calm which is left by that state of indecision and indifference: they live without wishing to know what they are; for it is much more convenient to be nothing, and to live without thinking, or any knowledge of themselves. No, my brethren, I repeat it; these are not unbelievers, they are cowards, who have not the courage to choose their

side; who know only how to live voluptuously, without rule, without morality, and often without decency; and who, without being atheists, live nevertheless without religion, for religion requires consistency, reason, elevation of mind, firmness, noble sentiments, and of all these they are incapable. Such, however, are the heroes of whom impiety boasts; such are the suffrages it receives and which it insultingly opposes to our religion; such are the partisans by whose aid it thinks itself invincible; and weak and wretched must its resources indeed be, since it is reduced to seek them in men of this description.

I have thus endeavoured to shew in the first place, that licentiousness springs not from doubts, but doubts from licentiousness. The second reason is only a fresh proof of the first; it is this, that if there be not a change of life, it will appear that it is not to their doubts, but solely to their passions that they cling.

For I ask nothing but candour from those of you who continually plead your doubts with regard to our mysteries. When you sometimes think of quitting that sink of vice and debauchery in which you live, and when the passions become more tranquil, allow you to reflect, do you then urge against it your uncertainties upon religion? Do you say to yourselves, 'If 'I return, it will be necessary to believe things which 'seem incredible'? Is this the great difficulty? Ah! no, you inwardly say, 'If I return it will be necessary 'to break off this connection, to deny myself these ex- 'cesses, to quit these societies, to shun these places, 'to proceed to things which I shall never support, 'and to adopt a manner of life to which all my incli-

'nations are repugnant.' These are what check you; this is the wall of separation which removes you from God. You speak constantly to others of your doubts; how comes it that you never speak of them to yourselves? This is not a matter, therefore, of reason and of belief; it is a matter of the heart and of licentiousness; and the delay of your conversion springs not from your uncertainties upon faith, but only from the doubt in which the violence and the empire of your passions leave you of ever being able to free yourselves from their subjection and infamy. Such, my brethren, are the true chains which bind our pretended unbelievers to their own wretchedness.

And this truth is more evident from this fact, that the majority of those who profess themselves unbelievers, live, nevertheless, in perpetual uncertainty upon the point even of unbelief. At certain moments they are affected with the truths of religion: they feel themselves torn with the keenest remorse; they even apply to the servants of God most distinguished for their learning and piety, to hold converse with, and receive instructions from them: at others, they make a sport of these truths; they treat the servants of God with derision, and piety itself as a chimera. There is scarcely one of these sinners, even of those who make the greatest ostentation of their unbelief, whom the spectacle of an unexpected death, a fatal accident, a grievous loss, or a reverse of fortune hath not cast into gloomy reflections on his situation, and excited desires of a more Christian life; there is hardly one who, in these trying situations, seeks not consolation in the support of the godly, and does not take some

step which leaves hopes of amendment. It is not to their companions in impiety and licentiousness that they then have recourse for consolation; it is not by those impious railleries upon our mysteries, and by that horrible philosophy that they try to alleviate their sufferings: these are the subjects of conversation in times of festivity and dissipation, and not of affliction and sorrow: it is the religion of the table, of pleasures, of riotings; it is not that of solemn adversity and sadness: the taste for impiety vanishes with that for pleasures. Now, if their unbelief were founded on real uncertainties with regard to religion, so long as these uncertainties existed, unbelief should be the same; but as their doubts spring only from their passions, and as their passions are not always the same, nor always masters of their heart, so their doubts continually fluctuate like their passions; they increase, they diminish, they are eclipsed, they re-appear, they are mutable, exactly in the same degree as their passions; in a word, they share the lot of the passions, for they are nothing but the passions themselves.

In effect, to leave nothing unsaid on this subject, and to make you thoroughly feel how much this vaunted profession of unbelief is despicable, I would beg you to observe that you may reply to every difficulty of the boasting sinner, and reduce him to have nothing more to say, and he still will not yield; you have not thereby gained him; he retires within himself, as if he had still more over-powering reasons which he disdains to bring forward: he keeps firm, and opposes a mysterious and decisive air to all those proofs which he cannot resolve. You then pity his

madness and obstinacy: you are mistaken; pity only his libertine life, and his want of candour; for, let a mortal disease strike him on quitting you; approach his bed of anguish, and you will find this pretended unbeliever convinced; his doubts cease, his uncertainties end, all that deplorable display of unbelief vanishes and tumbles in pieces; there is no longer even a thought about it; he has recourse to the God of his fathers, and trembles at the judgments he made a shew of not believing. The minister of Jesus Christ, who is called in, has no occasion to enter into controversy to undeceive him on his impiety: the dying sinner anticipates his cares and his ministry: he is ashamed of his past blasphemies, and repents of them; he acknowledges their falsity and deception; he makes a public amends for them to the majesty and truth of religion; he no longer demands proofs, he asks only consolation. His disease hath nevertheless brought no new lights to the aid of faith; the blow which strikes his flesh hath not cleared up the doubts of his mind; no! it is because it touches his heart, and terminates his riots; in a word, it is because his doubts were in his passions, and whatever tends to extinguish his passions, tends at the same time to extinguish his doubts.

It happens, I confess, that sinners are sometimes found, who push their madness and impiety even to that last moment: who expire while vomiting forth with their impious souls, blasphemies against the God who is to judge them, and whom they refuse to acknowledge. For, O my God! thou art terrible in thy judgments, and sometimes permittest the atheist to

die in his impiety. But such examples are rare; and you well know, my brethren, that an entire age scarcely furnishes one of these shocking spectacles. But view, in that last moment, all the others who boasted of their unbelief; turn your eyes to the sinner on the bed of death, who had hitherto appeared the firmest in impiety, and the most resolute in denying all belief; you will find that he even anticipates the proposal of having recourse to the remedies of the church: he lifts up his hands to heaven, and gives striking and sincere marks of a religion which was never effaced from the bottom of his heart; he no longer rejects, as childish bugbears, the threatenings and chastisements of a future life: nay, more! this sinner, formerly so firm, so stately in his pretended unbelief, so much above vulgar fears, then becomes weaker, more fearful, and more credulous, than the lowest of the people; his fears are more excessive, his very religion more superstitious, his practices of worship more silly, and more extravagant than those of the vulgar; and, as one excess borders on its opposite excess, he is seen to pass in a moment from impiety to superstition; from the firmness of the philosopher, to all the weakness of the ignorant and simple.

And here it is, that, with Tertullian, I would appeal to this dying sinner, and let him speak in my stead, against unbelief; it is here that, to the honour of the religion of our fathers, I would wish no other testimony of the weakness and of the insincerity of the pretended atheist, than this expiring soul, who, can now surely speak only the language of truth; it is here that I would assemble all unbelievers around his

bed of death; and, to overthrow them by a testimony which could not be suspicious, would say to him, with Tertullian: "Before thou quittest this earthly body, "from which thou art so soon to be freed, suffer me to "call upon thy testimony: speak, in this last moment, "when vanity expires, and thou owest every thing to "the truth; say, if thou considerest the terrible God, "into whose hands thou art about to depart, as a chi- "merical being with whom weak and credulous minds "are alarmed? Say, if, at this moment when every "thing is disappearing from thine eyes, and all crea- "tures returning to nothing, God alone doth not ap- "pear to thee immortal, unchangeable, the being of all "ages and of eternity, and who filleth the heavens and "the earth? We whom thou hast always considered "as superstitious and vulgar minds, we consent that "thou shouldst judge between us and unbelief, to "which thou hast ever been so partial. Though, with "regard to faith, thou hast hitherto been as a stranger "and the enemy of religion, religion refers its cause "to thee, against those with whom the shocking tie of "impiety had so closely united thee. If all die with "thee, why does death appear so dreadful? Why "these uplifted hands to heaven, if there be no God "who may listen to thy prayers, and be touched by "thy groanings? If nothing thyself, why belie the "nothingness of thy being, and why tremble upon the "sequel of thy destiny? Whence come these feel- "ings of dread and of respect for the supreme Being "in this last moment? Is it not, that they have ever "been in thee, that thou hast imposed upon the public "by a false ostentation of impiety, and that death only

"unfolds dispositions of faith and of religion, which, "though dormant, have never ceased to exist during "life."

Yes, my brethren, could the passions be destroyed, all unbelievers would soon be recalled to a sense of religion; and a final reason, which fully proves it is, that, if they appear to revolt against the incomprehensibility of our mysteries, it is solely for the purpose of combating what touches them, and of attacking the truths which interest the passions; that is to say, the truth of a future state, and the eternity of future punishments; this is always the favourite conclusion and fruit of their doubts.

In effect, if religion, without adding maxims and truths which restrain the passions, proposed only mysteries which exceed reason, we may boldly say, that unbelievers would be rare; few are interested in those abstract truths or errors, which is a matter of indifference to believe or to deny. You will find few real votaries of truth who become partisans and zealots in support of merely speculative and unimportant points, because they believe them to be true. The abstract truths of mathematics have found, in our days, some zealous and estimable followers, who have devoted themselves to the elucidation of what is held as most impenetrable in the infinite secrets and profound obscurities of that science; but these are rare and singular men: the infection was little to be dreaded, nor, in truth, has it spread; they are admired, but few would wish to follow their example. If religion proposed only truths equally abstract, equally indifferent to the senses, equally uninteresting to the passions,

and to self-love, atheists would be still more rare than mathematicians. The truths of religion are objected to, merely because they threaten us: no objections are made to the others, because their truth or their falsity is alike indifferent.

And let it not be said that it is from the love of truth alone, and not from self-interest, that the unbeliever rejects mysteries which reason rejects. This, I well know, is the boast of the pretended unbeliever, and he would wish us to think so; but of what consequence is the truth to men, who, far from either seeking, loving, or knowing it, wish even to conceal it from themselves? What matters to them a truth beyond their reach, and to which they have never devoted a single serious moment; which, having nothing flattering to the passions, can never be interesting to men of flesh and blood, plunged, like them, in a voluptuous life? Their object is to gratify their irregular desires, and yet have nothing to dread after this life; this is the only truth which interests them: give up that point, and the obscurity of all the other mysteries will not occupy even a thought; let them but tranquilly enjoy their crimes, and they will agree to every thing.

Thus the majority of infidels who have left in writing the wretched fruits of their impiety, have always endeavoured to prove that there was nothing above us; that every thing died with the body, and that there were no future punishments or rewards. To attract followers, they saw that it was necessary to secure the suffrage of the passions. If they ever attacked the other points of religion, it was only to come to the main conclusion,

that there is nothing after this life; that vices or virtues are names invented by policy to restrain the people; and that the passions are only natural and innocent inclinations, which every one may follow, because every one finds them in himself.

This is the reason why the impious, in the Book of Wisdom, and the Sadducees themselves, in the gospel, who may be considered as the fathers and predecessors of our unbelievers, never took any pains to refute the truth of the miracles related in the books of Moses, and which God formerly wrought in favour of his people, nor the promise of the Mediator made to their fathers: they attacked only the resurrection of the dead, and the immortality of the soul: that point decided every thing for them. "Man dies like the "beast," said they in the book of Wisdom; "we "know not if their nature be different, but their end "and their destiny are the same: trouble us no more, "therefore, about a futurity which will never take "place; let us enjoy life; let us refuse ourselves no "gratification: time is short; let us hasten to live, "for we shall die to-morrow, and because all shall "die with us." Yes, my brethren, unbelief hath always originated in the passions: the yoke of faith is never rejected but in order to shake off the yoke of duty; and religion would never have an enemy, were it not the enemy of licentiousness and vice.

But, if the doubts of our unbelievers are not real, in consequence of being formed by licentiousness alone, they are also false, because their ignorance adopts without comprehending them, and their vanity

makes a boast without being able to make a resource of them: this is what now remains for me to unfold.

PART II. The same answer might be made to the majority of those who are continually boasting of their doubts upon religion, and who find nothing but contradictions in what faith obliges us to believe, that Tertullian formerly made to the heathens when they inveighed against the mysteries and the doctrine of Jesus Christ. They condemn, said he, what they do not understand; they blame what they have never examined, and what they know only by hearsay; they blaspheme what they are ignorant of, and they are ignorant of it, because they hate it too much to give themselves the trouble of searching into it. Now, continues this holy father, nothing is more indecent and foolish than boldly to decide upon what we know not; and all that religion would require of these frivolous and dissolute men, who oppose it so warmly, is not to condemn before they are well acquainted with it.

Such, my brethren, is the situation of almost all who give themselves out in the world as unbelievers; they have investigated neither the difficulties nor the respectable proofs of religion; they know not even enough to doubt of them. They hate it; for how is it possible to love what condemns us? And that hatred makes them at first doubt, and afterwards combat religion.

In truth, my brethren, when I glance my eye over all that the Christian world has produced of great men, elevated geniuses, profound and enlightened scholars, who, after an entire life of study and indefatigable ap-

plication, have, with an humble docility, submitted to the mysteries of faith; have found the proofs of religion so strong, that the proudest, and most untractable reason might, in their opinion, without derogation, comply; have defended it against the blasphemies of the pagans; have silenced the vain philosophy of the wise men of the age, and made the folly of the cross to triumph over all the wisdom and erudition of Rome and Athens; it strikes me, that, in order to renew the attack against mysteries so long and so universally established; that, in order to be heard by appeal, if I may venture to say so, from the judgment of so many ages, from the writings of so many great men, from so many victories achieved by faith, from the consent of the universe, in a word, from a prescription so long and so well strengthened, it would require either new proofs that had never yet been controverted, or new difficulties that had never yet been started, or new methods which discovered a weak side in religion as yet never found out. It seems to me, that, singly to rise up against so many testimonies, so many prodigies, so many ages, so many divine monuments, so many famous personages, so many works which time hath consecrated, and which, like pure gold, have quitted the ordeal of unbelief only more resplendent and immortal, in a word, so many surprising, and till then unheard-of, events, which establish the faith of Christians, it would require very decisive and very evident reasons, very rare and uncommon lights, to pretend even to doubt, much less to oppose it. Would not that man be deservedly considered as out of his senses, who should attempt to defy an whole army,

merely to make an ostentation of a vain defiance, and to pride himself upon a burlesque bravery?

Nevertheless, when you examine the majority of those who call themselves unbelievers, who are continually clamouring against the popular prejudices, who boast of their doubts, and defy us to satisfy or to answer them; you find that their only knowledge consists of some hackneyed and vulgar doubts, which, have been in all times, and still continue to be, argued in the world; that they know nothing but a certain jargon of free-thinking which goes from hand to hand, which they receive without examination, and repeat without understanding: you find that their whole skill and study of religion are reduced to some sceptical sayings, which, if I may be allowed the expression, are the proper language of the streets; to certain maxims which, through mere repetition, begin to appear proverbial. You will find no foundation, no principle, no concatenation of doctrine, no knowledge even of the religion which they attack: you will soon see that they are men immersed in pleasure, and who would be very sorry to have a spare moment to devote to the investigation of wearisome truths which they are indifferent whether they know or not; men of a light and superficial character, and wholly unfitted for a moment's serious meditation or investigation; let me again repeat, you will find that they are men drowned in voluptuousness, and in whom even that portion of penetration and understanding, accorded by nature, hath been debased and extinguished by debauchery.

Such are the formidable supports of unbelief against the knowledge of God; in them you may behold the

frivolous, dissipated, and ignorant characters who dare to tax, with credulity and ignorance, all that Christianity hath possessed and still possesses of learned, able, and celebrated personages: they know the language of doubt; but they have learned it by rote, for they have never formed it; they only repeat what they have heard: ignorance and impiety are handed down to them: they have no doubts; they only preserve, for those to come, the language of irreligion and scepticism; they are not unbelievers, they are only the echoes of unbelief; in a word, they know how to express a doubt, but they are too ignorant to doubt themselves.

And a proof of what I advance is, that, in all other matters of doubt, we hesitate only in order to be instructed; every thing is examined which can elucidate the concealed truth. But here the doubt is merely for doubting's sake; a proof that we are equally uninterested in the doubt, as in the truth which conceals it from us; these sceptics would be very sorry were they under the necessity of clearing up either the falsity, or the truth of the uncertainties which they pretend to feel with regard to our mysteries. Yes, my brethren, were the punishment of sceptics to be that of an indispensable obligation to seek the truth, no one would doubt; no one would purchase, at such a price, the pleasure of calling himself an unbeliever; few indeed would be capable of it: a decisive proof that they do not doubt, and that they are as little attached to their doubts, as to religion (for their knowledge in both is much about the same;) but only that they have lost those first feelings of discretion and of faith which

left them still some vestige of respect for the religion of our fathers. Thus, it is doing too much honour to men, so worthy both of pity and contempt, to suppose that they have taken a side, or that they have embraced a system; you honour them too much by ranking them among the impious followers of a Socinus, by ennobling them with the shocking titles of deists or atheists: alas! they are nothing: they are of no system; at least, they neither know themselves what they are, nor can they tell what that system is; and, strange as it may appear, they have found out the secret of forming a state more despicable, more mean, and more unworthy of reason, than even that of impiety; and it is even doing them credit to call them by the shocking title of unbelievers, which had hitherto been considered as the shame of humanity, and the highest reproach of man.

And, to conclude this part of my discourse with a reflection which confirms the same truth, and is very humiliating for our pretended unbelievers, I observe that they, who affect to treat us as weak and credulous minds, who boast of their reason, who accuse us of founding our religion upon popular prejudices, and of believing, solely because our predecessors have believed; they, I say, doubt upon the miserable authority of a debauchee, whom they have often heard to say, that futurity is a bugbear, made use of to frighten only children and the vulgar: this is their only knowledge, and the only use they make of reason. They are infidels, as they accuse us of being believers, without examination, and through credulousness; but their credulity can find no excuse but in madness and folly;

the authority of a single impious discourse, pronounced in a bold and decisive tone, hath subjugated their reason, and ranked them in the lists of impiety. They call us credulous, in yielding to the authority of the prophets, of the apostles, of men inspired by God, of the shining miracles wrought to establish the truth of our mysteries, and to that venerable tradition of holy pastors, who, from age to age, have transmitted to us the charge of doctrine and of truth; that is, to the greatest authority that hath ever been on the earth; and they think themselves less credulous, and it appears to them more worthy of reason, to submit to the authority of a free-thinker, who, in a moment of debauchery, pronounces, with a firm tone, that there is no God, yet, most likely, inwardly belies his own words.—Ah! my brethren, how much does man degrade and render himself contemptible when he arrogates to himself a false glory from being no longer in the belief of a God!

Why is it, also, do you think, that our pretended unbelievers are so desirous of seeing real atheists confirmed in impiety; that they seek and entice them even from foreign countries, like a Spinosa, if the fact be true, that he was called into France to be heard and consulted? It is because our unbelievers are not firm in unbelief, nor can they find any who are so; and, in order to harden themselves, they would gladly see some one actually confirmed in that detestable cause: they seek, in precedent, a resource and defence against their own conscience; and, not daring of themselves to become impious, they expect from an example what their reason and even their heart re-

fuses; and, in so doing, they surely fall into a credulity much more childish and absurd than that with which they reproach believers. Spinosa, that celebrated monster, who, after embracing various religions, ended with none, was not anxious to find out some professed free-thinker who might confirm him in the cause of irreligion and atheism: he formed to himself that impenetrable chaos of impiety, that work of confusion and darkness in which only the desire of not believing in God can support the weariness and disgust of those who read it; in which, with the exception of the impiety, all is unintelligible; and which would, from its birth, have sunk into oblivion, had it not, to the shame of humanity, attacked the supreme Being: that impious wretch, I say, lived concealed, retired, and tranquil: his dark productions were his only occupation, and, to harden himself, he needed only himself. But those who so eagerly sought him, who longed to see, hear and consult him, those frivolous and dissolute men were fools who wished to become impious; and who, not finding in the testimony of all ages, of all nations, and of all the great men who have honoured religion, sufficient to induce them to remain believers, sought, in the single testimony of an obscure individual, a deserter from every religion, a monster obliged to hide himself from the eyes of men, a deplorable and monstrous authority which might confirm them in impiety, and defend them from their own conscience. Great God! let the impious here hide their faces; let them cease to make an ostentation of an unbelief which is the fruit of their depravity and ignorance, and no longer speak, but with blushes, of

the submission of believers: it is all a language of deceit; they give to vanity what we give to truth.

I say vanity; and this is the great and final reason which exposes still more clearly all the falsity and weakness of unbelief. Yes, my brethren, all our pretended unbelievers are bullies, who give themselves out for what they are not; they consider unbelief as giving an air of gentility; they are continually boasting that they believe nothing, and, by dint of boasting, they at last persuade themselves of it: like certain upstarts whom we see among us, who, though just emerged from the obscurity and vulgarity of their ancestors, have the deplorable vanity of wishing to be thought of an illustrious birth, and descended from the greatest names, and by dint of blazoning and repeating it, attain almost to the belief of it themselves. It is the same with our pretended unbelievers; they have scarcely parted with the faith which they received at their birth, it still flows with their blood, and is not yet effaced from their heart; but they think it a vulgarity and meanness, at which they blush, and by dint of saying and boasting that they believe nothing, they are convinced that they really do not believe, and have consequently a much higher opinion of themselves.

In the first place, Because the profession of unbelief supposes an uncommon understanding, strength and superiority of mind, and a singularity which is pleasing; on the contrary, subjection to the passions infers only licentiousness and debauchery, of which all men are capable, though they are not so capable of that wonderful superiority attributed to itself by impiety.

In the second place, Because faith is so weakened in our age, that we find few in the world, who pique themselves upon wit and a little more knowledge or erudition than others, who do not allow themselves doubts and difficulties upon the most august and most sacred parts of religion. It would be a disgrace, therefore, in their company to appear religious and believers: they are men high in the public esteem, and any resemblance to them is flattering; in adopting their language, their talents and reputation are thought likewise to be adopted; and not to dare to follow or to copy them would, it seems, be making a public avowal of weakness and mediocrity. Miserable and childish vanity! Besides, they have heard that certain characters, distinguished in their age, did not believe; and as the memory of their talents and great actions has been preserved only with that of their irreligion, they boast of these great examples: after such illustrious models, it appears dignified to believe nothing; their names are constantly in their mouths. With more vanity and littleness of mind than credulity, they dress themselves out in borrowed robes, since nothing can be more miserable or mean than to give ourselves out for what we are not, or to assume the personage of another.

Lastly, Because the language of impiety is, in general, the consequence of licentious society. We wish to appear the same as our companions in debauchery; for it would be a shame to be dissolute, and yet to have the appearance of religion, in the very presence of our accomplices in riot. It is a sorry cause, that of a debauchee who still believes; impiety and scepticism are requisite to give the true air to a debauchee; with-

out these he would be only a novice in profligacy: the dread of future punishment is left to those yet unexercised in guilt; this remnant of religion seems to savour too much of childhood and the college. But when attained to a certain length in debauchery, they must soar above these vulgar weaknesses; their opinion of themselves is raised in proportion as they can persuade others that they are now above all these fears; they even mock those who appear still to dread: like the wife of Job, they say, with a tone of irony and impiety, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Art "thou so simple as to believe all the tales with which "thy childhood hath been alarmed? Thou seest not "that all these are merely the visions of weak minds, "and that the more knowing, who preach them up so "much, believe not a word of them themselves!"

O my God! How mean and despicable is the impious man, who seems so proudly to contemn thee? He is a coward, who outwardly insults, yet inwardly fears thee; he is a vain boaster, who makes a shew of unbelief, but tells not what passes within; he is an impostor, who, wishing to deceive others, cannot succeed in deceiving himself; he is a fool, who, without a single inducement, adopts all the horrors of impiety; he is a madman, who, unable to attain irreligion, or to extinguish the terrors of his conscience, extinguishes in himself all modesty and decency, and endeavours to make an impious merit of it in the eyes of men; who madly sacrifices, to the deplorable vanity of being thought an unbeliever, his religion which he still preserves, his God whom he dreads, his conscience which he feels, his eternal salvation which he

hopes. What a desertion of God, and what a depth of madness and folly!

And could you, my brethren, (and in this wish I comprise the whole fruit of this discourse) who still feel a reverence for the religion of our fathers, but feel how contemptible are those men who give themselves out as free-thinkers, and for whom you often feel so much esteem; you would then perceive how frivolous and ridiculous the profession of unbelief, now so fashionable among us, ought to be considered; you would then know that this ostentation of impiety, which the corruption of our manners hath now rendered so common even to both sexes, conceals all that is considered most disgraceful and mean even according to the ideas of the world.

In the first place, Licentiousness. They reach the avowal of impiety only when the heart is profoundly corrupt; when they secretly live in the most shameful debauchery; and when, if known for what they are, they would be for ever dishonoured even in the eyes of men.

In the second place, Meanness. They play the philosopher and the wit, while, in secret, they are the most groveling, the most dissolute, the most abandoned, and the weakest of sinners, the slaves of every passion unworthy of modesty, and even of reason.

Thirdly, Deceit and imposition. They act a borrowed character; they give themselves out for what they are not; and, while exclaiming so loudly against the godly, and treating them as impostors and hypocrites, they are themselves the very cheats they decry, and the hypocrites of impiety and free-thinking.

Fourthly, Ostentation and a wretched vanity. They act the hero, while inwardly trembling; for, on the first signal of death, they betray more cowardice than even the lowest of the people: they make a shew of openly insulting that God whom they still inwardly dread, and whom they even hope to render one day favourable to themselves: thus giving themselves a character of childishness and buffoonery, which the world itself hath always considered as the lowest, the vilest, and the most ridiculous of all characters.

Fifthly, Temerity. Without erudition or knowledge, they dare to set up as judges of what they are totally ignorant of; to condemn the greatest characters of every age; and to decide upon important points to which they have never given, and, indeed, to which they are incapable of giving, a single moment of serious attention: and indecency of conduct which can accord only with men who have nothing more to lose on the side of honour.

Sixthly, Madness. They pride themselves in appearing without religion; that is to say, without character, morals, probity, fear of God and of man, and as if capable of every thing except virtue and innocence.

Seventhly, Superstition. We have seen these pretended free-thinkers, who refuse to consult the oracles of the holy prophets, consulting conjurors; admitting in men that knowledge of futurity which they refuse to God; giving into every childish credulity, while revolting against the majesty of faith; expecting their aggrandizement and fortune from a deceitful oracle, and unwilling to hope their salvation from the oracles of our holy books; in a word, ridiculously believing

in demons, while they make a boast of disbelieving a God.

To conclude, What, in my opinion, is most deplorable in the sceptic is, that he is in a situation which precludes almost every hope of salvation. For an actual unbeliever, if such there be, may, in a moment, be stricken of God, and overwhelmed, as it were, under the weight of that glory and majesty which he had unknowingly blasphemed: the eyes of this unfortunate wretch may still be opened by the Lord in his mercy; he may make his light to shine through his darkness, and reveal that truth which he resists only because he knows it not; he has still resources, such as perhaps rectitude, consistency, principles, (of error and illusion, I confess, but still they are principles:) he will be equally warm for his God when known, as he was his enemy when unknown. But the unbelievers, of whom I speak, have scarcely a way left of returning to God; they insult the Lord whom they know; they blaspheme that religion which they still preserve in their heart; they resist the impressions of their conscience which still inwardly espouses the cause of faith against themselves: In vain does the light of God shine upon their heart, it serves only to render more inexcusable the treachery of their impiety. Were they, saith Jesus Christ, absolutely blind, they would be worthy of pity, and their sin would be less: but at present they see; and thus the guilt of their irreligion becomes a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth for ever upon their heads.

Let us repair then, my brethren, by our respect for the religion of our fathers, by a continual manifestation

of gratitude towards the Lord, who hath permitted us to be born in the way of salvation, into which so many nations have not as yet been deemed worthy to enter: let us repair, I say, the scandal of unbelief so common in this age, so much countenanced among us, and which, having become more bold through the number and quality of its partizans, no longer hides its head, but openly shews itself, and braves, as it were, the religion of the prince, and the zeal of the pastor. Let us hold in detestation those impious and despicable men, who pride themselves in turning into ridicule the majesty of the religion they profess: let us fly them as monsters unworthy to live, not only among believers, but even among those connected together by honour, probity, and reason; and, far from applauding their impious discourses, let us cover them with the shame of that contempt which they merit. Nothing is more low and mean, even according to the ideas of the world, than to dishonour the religion in which we live; nothing is more beautiful and more honourable, than to take a pride in respecting and defending it, even with an air of authority and indignation, against the silly speeches which attack it. By despising unbelief, let us deprive it of the miserable glory it seeks: from the moment they are despised, unbelievers will be rare among us; and the same vanity which forms their doubts will soon annihilate or conceal them, when it shall be a disgrace among us to appear impious, and a glory to be a believer. It is thus that this scandal shall be done away, and that we shall all glorify the Lord in the same faith, and in the expectation of the eternal promises. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

EVIDENCE OF THE LAW OF GOD.

JOHN viii. 46.

And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

PREVIOUSLY to the period recorded in the text, our Saviour had confounded the incredulity of the Jews by his works and miracles; on this occasion he appeals to the judgment of their own conscience and to the evidence of the truth, which, in spite of themselves, rendered testimony to his doctrine and to his ministry. Nevertheless, as they shut their eyes against the evidence of his miracles, in accusing him of operating them through the ministry of devils, so they likewise hardened themselves against the evidence of his doctrine and of his mission, so clearly foretold in the scriptures, by alleging pretended obscurities, which rendered them, in their eyes, still doubtful and suspicious.

For, my brethren, however evident may be the truth, that is to say, the law of God, whether in our heart, where it is written in shining and ineffaceable characters, or in the rules, which Jesus Christ hath left to us;

we always wish either that our conscience should see nothing in it but what our passions see, or that these rules should be so framed that we may always be able to find out some favourable interpretation and mitigation of them.

Accordingly, we find two pretexts commonly made use of by sinners against the evidence of the most awful truths, of the law of God.

In the first place, In order to make themselves easy with regard to a thousand abuses, authorised by the world, they tell us that they believe themselves to be in safety in that state; that their conscience reproaches them with nothing on that head; and that, could they be persuaded that they were in the path of error, they would instantly quit it. The first pretext, therefore, which is opposed to the evidence of the law of God, is that of sincerity and tranquillity of conscience.

Secondly, They maintain that the gospel is not so clear, and so explicit on certain points as we hold it to be; that each interprets it in his own way, and makes it speak whatever he wishes; and that what appears so positive to us, appears not so to the rest of the world. Their second pretext therefore, is the obscurity and uncertainty of the gospel rules.

Now, I say that the law of God hath a two-fold evidence, which shall overthrow these two pretexts, and defeat, at the day of judgment, all the vain excuses of sinners.

1*st.* It is evident in the conscience of the sinner:

2*dly.* It is evident in the simplicity of its rules.—The evidence of the law of God in the conscience of men is the first proof of the law of God, by which

the false security and pretended sincerity of worldly souls shall be judged. The evidence of the law of God in the simplicity of its rules, is the second proof of the law of God, by which the affected uncertainties, and the false interpretations of sinners shall be judged. And thus it is, O my God! that thy holy law shall judge the world, and that the criminal conscience shall one day be confounded before thy tribunal, both by its own lights, and by the perspicuity of thy heavenly maxims.

PART I. It is somewhat surprising that so many persons should allege their sincerity, and the tranquillity of their conscience, as a justification of the dangerous maxims and abuses of the world. Independent of peace and security, in the false paths of iniquity, being rather a punishment than an excuse; and, were it even true, that the conscience ought not to reproach them when their morals are regulated solely according to the false judgments of the world; still a being in that state would be only so much the more hopeless of salvation: it appears that, of all tribunals, his own conscience is the last to which an unbeliever should appeal; and that nothing is less favourable to the errors of a sinner, than the sinner himself.

I know that there are hardened beings, to whom no ray of grace or of reason can carry conviction; who live without remorse and without anxiety in all the horrors of an infamous licentiousness; in whom all conscience seems extinguished, and who carry the excess of their blindness, says St. Augustin, so far, as even to glory in their blindness. But these are only rare and dreadful examples of God's justice upon men;

and if such have appeared upon the earth, they only prove how far his neglect and the power of his wrath may sometimes go.

Yes, my brethren, whether we affect boldly and openly to cast off the authority of the law, like the impious and the licentious; or whether, like the greater part of the world, we endeavour to mitigate and artfully to reconcile it with our passions, by favourable interpretations; our conscience renders a two-fold testimony within us to this divine law: a testimony of truth to the equity and to the necessity of its maxims, and a testimony of rigid adherence to its rules.

I say, in the first place, A testimony of truth to the equity of its maxims. For, my brethren, God is too wise not to love order; and he is, at the same time, too good not to wish our welfare. His law must consequently bear these two features; a character of equity, and a character of goodness: a character of equity, which regulates our duties; and a character of goodness, which makes us find our peace and our happiness here below, in duty and in regularity.

We are likewise sensible, in the bottom of our hearts, that these rules are just and reasonable; that the law of God commands nothing but what is consistent with the real interests of man; that nothing becomes a reasonable being more than gentleness, humanity, temperance, modesty, and all the virtues recommended in the gospel; that the passions prohibited by the law are the only source of all our troubles; that the more we deviate from the law of God, the more do we remove from ourselves peace and tranquillity of heart; and that the Lord, in forbidding us

to yield ourselves up to impetuous and iniquitous passions, hath only forbidden us to yield ourselves up to our own tyrants, and that his only intention hath been to render us happy in rendering us believers.

Here then is a testimony which the law of God finds in the bottom of our hearts. Hurried away by the delusion of the senses, we vainly cast off the yoke of the holy rules; we can never succeed in justifying, even to ourselves, our own irregularities; we always internally adopt the interests of the law against ourselves; we always find within ourselves a justification of the divine rules against the passions. We cannot corrupt this internal witness of the truth, which pleads within us for virtue; we always feel a secret struggle between our inclinations and our reason: the law of God, born in our heart, incessantly combats there against the law of the flesh foreign to man; it maintains its truth there in spite of ourselves, if it cannot maintain its authority; it officiates as a censor, if it cannot serve as a director; in a word, it renders us unhappy if it cannot render us believers.

Thus it is, that we vainly give way at times to all the bitterness of hatred and revenge; we immediately feel that this cruel pleasure is not made for the heart of man; that to hate, is, in fact, to punish ourselves; and, in returning to ourselves after the transports of passion, we find within us a principle of humanity which disavows their violence, and clearly points out to us, that gentleness and kindness were our first inclinations, and that, in commanding us to love our brethren, the law of God hath only consulted the most upright and reasonable feelings of our heart, in

order to reconcile us with ourselves. Thou art more righteous than I, said Saul to David, in the time of his strongest hatred against him. That goodness, born in the heart of all men, forced from him that confession, and inwardly disavowed the injustice and the cruelty of his revenge.

In vain do we plunge ourselves into brutal and sensual gratifications, and madly run after whatever may satisfy the insatiable desires of pleasure: we quickly feel that debauchery leads us too far to be agreeable to nature: that whatever enslaves and tyrannises over us, overturns the order of our first institution; and that the gospel, in prohibiting the voluptuous passions, hath provided for the tranquillity of our heart, and for restoring to us all its elevation and nobility. How many hired servants of my father's, said the prodigal, still bound in the chains of vice, have bread enough, and to spare! and I consume my days in weariness, and in shame. It was a remnant of reason and nobility which still made itself heard from the bottom of his heart.

Lastly, investigate all the precepts of the law of God, and you will feel that they have a necessary connection with the heart of man; that they are rules built upon a profound knowledge of what takes place within us; that they contain only the remedies of our most secret evils, and the succours of our most righteous inclinations; and that none but he alone, who knoweth the bottom of hearts, could be capable of laying down such maxims to men. The heathens themselves, in whom truth was not yet extinguished, rendered this glory to the Christian morality; they

were forced to admire the wisdom of its precepts, the necessity of its restraints, the sanctity of its counsels, the good sense and sublimity of its rules; they were astonished to find, in the discourses of Jesus Christ, a more sublime philosophy than in the schools of Rome or Greece; and they could not comprehend how the son of Mary should be better acquainted with the duties, the desires, and the secret folds of the human heart, than Plato and all his disciples.

Will you contend, after this, that nature is our first law, and that tendencies to pleasure, inherent in our being, can never be crimes; I have often remarked that this is an impiety only of conversation; an ostentation of free-thinking, of which vanity makes a boast, but which truth inwardly contradicts. During the period of his errors, St. Augustin spared no pains to efface from the bottom of his heart, those remains of faith and of conscience which still recalled him to the truth; he eagerly sought, in the most impious opinions, and in the most shocking errors, wherewithal to comfort himself against his crimes; his mind, flying the light which pursued him, wandered from impiety to impiety, and from error to error; nevertheless, in spite of all his efforts and flights, the truth, always victorious in the bottom of his soul, proclaimed its triumph in spite of himself; he could succeed neither in seducing nor in quieting himself in his disorders: "I bore, O my God," says he, "a conscience racked, and still bleeding, as it were, from the grievous wounds which my passions incessantly made there; I was a burden to myself; I could no longer sustain my own heart; I turned myself on every side, and no where

could it find ease; I knew not where to lay it, that I might be delivered from it, and that mine anxiety might be comforted."

Behold the testimony given of himself by a sinner, who, to all the keenness of the passions, added the impiety of opinion, and the abuse of reason. These examples are of every age; our own has beheld celebrated and avowed sinners, who made an infamous boast of not believing in God, and who were looked upon as heroes in impiety and free-thinking; we have seen them, touched at last with repentance like Augustin, and recalled from their errors; we have seen them, I say, make an open avowal, that they had never been able to succeed in effacing the divine rules from their soul; that, amidst all their most shocking impieties and excesses, their heart, still Christian, inwardly contradicted their derisions and blasphemies; that, before men, they boasted of a strength of mind which forsook them in private; that this apparent unbelief concealed the most cruel feelings of remorse, and the most gloomy fears; and that they had never been firm and tranquil in guilt.

Yes, my brethren, guilt, always timorous, bears every where a witness of condemnation against itself. Every where you render homage, by your inward anxieties and remorse, to the sanctity of that law which you violate; every where a sensation of weariness and of sorrow, inseparable from guilt, makes you feel, that regularity and innocence are the only happiness which was intended for you on the earth: you vainly display an affected intrepidity, but find that the guilty conscience always betrays itself. Cruel terrors

march every where before you; solitude disquiets, darkness alarms you; you fancy that you see phantoms coming from every quarter to reproach you with the secret errors of your soul; unlucky dreams fill you with dark and gloomy fancies; and guilt, after which you run with so much relish, pursues you in the sequel like a cruel vulture, and fixes itself upon you, to tear your heart, and to punish you for the pleasure which it had formerly given you.—O my God! what resources hast thou not left in our heart to recal us to thee! And how powerful is the protection which the goodness and righteousness of thy law find in the bottom of our heart! The testimony of truth to the sanctity of its maxims, is therefore the first testimony which the conscience renders to the law of God

But it also renders a testimony of rigid adherence to its rules. For another mistake, of which the greater number of worldly beings are guilty, who live exempted from great irregularities, but who otherwise pass their lives amidst the pleasures, the abuses, the sensualities, and the dissipations authorised by the world, is, that of wishing to persuade themselves that the gospel requires no more, and to persuade us, that their conscience reproaches them with nothing, and that they believe themselves safe in that state. Now, I say that on this point the worldly conscience is again insincere as well as deceived; and that, in spite of the mitigation which they pretend to hope for, they feel at the bottom of their hearts, how necessary it is to adhere strictly to the rules of the divine law.

In effect, order requires that all our passions be regulated by the bridle of the law; all our inclina-

tions, corrupted at their source, have occasion for a rule to rectify and correct them. We confess this ourselves; we feel that our corruption pervades the smallest as well as the greatest things; that self-love infects all our proceedings; and that we every where find ourselves weak, and in continual opposition to order and duty; we feel, then, that the rule ought, in no instance, to be favourable to our inclinations; that we ought every where to find it severe, because it ought every where to be in opposition to us; that the law cannot be in unity with us; that whatever favours our inclinations, can never be the remedy intended to cure them; that whatever flatters our desires, can never be the bridle which is to restrain them; in a word, that whatever nourishes self-love, is not the law which is established for the sole purpose of destroying and annihilating it. Thus, by an inward feeling, inseparable from our being, we always discriminate ourselves from the law; our inclinations from its rules; our pleasures from its duties; and, in all dubious actions where we decide in favour of our inclinations, we feel perfectly that we are deviating from the law of God, always more rigid than ourselves.

And allow me here, my brethren, to appeal to your conscience itself, which you always introduce, and to which you are continually referring. Are you, honestly speaking, at your ease, as you wish to persuade us, in this life of pleasure, of dissipation, of indolence, and of sensuality; in a word, in this worldly life, the innocence of which you constantly maintain? Have you hitherto been able to succeed in persuading yourselves, that it is the path which leads to salvation?

Do you not feel that something more is required of you by the gospel than you perform? Would you wish to appear before God with nothing to offer to him but these pleasures, these amusements which you call innocent, and of which the principal groundwork of your life is composed? I ask you, whether in those moments when, more warmly affected perhaps by grace, you propose seriously to think upon eternity, you do not place, in the plan which you then form of a new life, the privation of almost every thing in which you now say that you see no harm? Do you not begin by promising to yourselves, that, solely occupied then with your salvation, you will renounce the excesses of gaming, the theatre, the vanities and indecencies of dress, the dissipation of public assemblies and pleasures; that you will devote more time to prayer, to retirement, to holy reading, and to the duties of religion? Now, what is it that you hereby acknowledge, unless it be, that, while you renounce not all these abuses, while you devote not more time to these pious duties, you do not think seriously upon your salvation, you ought to have no pretension to it, and you are in the path of death and perdition?

But, besides, let me beg of you who carry so far the severity of your censures against the godly, to recollect all the rigour of your maxims, and of your ridicule of their conduct; do you not blame, do you not continually censure those persons who wish to connect, with a public profession of piety, those abuses and amusements, of which you are the daily apologists, and who wish to enjoy the reputation of virtue without losing any of the pleasures of the world? Do you not ridicule

their piety as a mere piece of grimace? Here it is that you emphatically display all the austerity of the Christian life. Do you not say that it is necessary either totally to renounce the world, or to continue to live as the world lives; and that all these ambiguous virtues serve only to throw true virtue into discredit? I agree with you in this; but I also reply, Your conscience dictates to you that it is not safe to give yourself partially to God, and yet, your conscience reproaches you not, as you say, in a life in which God enters not at all? You condemn those mistaken souls whom division, at least in appearance, between the world and Jesus Christ may comfort? And you justify your own conduct, when you have nothing in its justification but the abuses of the world and the danger of its habits? Do you then believe that the path of salvation is more rugged for those who profess piety than for you? That the world hath privileges therein, which are forfeited from the moment that we mean to serve God? Be consistent then with yourselves; and either condemn no more a worldly virtue, or no longer justify the world itself; since whatever you blame in that kind of virtue is only that portion of it which the world supplies.

And, in order to make you more sensibly feel how far you are from being sincere on this head, let me observe that you continually take a pride in repeating that we despair of human weakness; that, in order to act up to all that we say in the Christian pulpit, it would be necessary to withdraw to the deserts, or to be angels rather than men. Observe, however, the force of truth. If a minister of the gospel were to deliver to you from this place a doctrine quite opposite to that

which we teach; were he to announce the same maxims which you daily hold forth in the world; were he to preach to you in this place of truth, that the gospel is not so severe as it is published; that we may love the world, and yet serve God; that there is no harm in gaming, in pleasures, in theatres, except what we ourselves occasion; that we must live like the world while we live in the world; that the language of the cross, of penitence, of mortification, and of self-denial, is more calculated for cloisters than for the court, and persons of a certain rank; and, lastly, that God is too good to consider as crimes, a thousand things which are become habitual, and from which we wish you nevertheless to abstain; were he, I say, to preach these maxims to you in this holy place, what would you think of him? What would you say to his new doctrine? What idea would you have of this new apostle? Would you consider him as a man come down from heaven to announce to you this new gospel? Would you believe him to be better instructed than we in the holy truths of salvation, and in the rules of the Christian life? No, you would laugh at his ignorance, or folly; you would perhaps be struck with horror at the profanation which he would make of his ministry.

What! my brethren, would these maxims, when announced from the altar, appear to you as blasphemy or madness; and yet, when promulgated in your daily conversations, would they become rules of reason and wisdom? In the mouth of a minister of the gospel you would look upon them as the speeches of a madman; and, in your mouth, should they appear more

solid and more weighty? You would laugh, or rather you would be struck with horror, at a preacher who should announce them; and yet you wish to persuade us that you speak seriously, and that you are consistent with yourselves, when you hold them forth with so much confidence.

Ah! my brethren, how insincere we are to God! and how terrible will he be when he shall come to avenge upon the lights of our own heart, the honour of his holy law! With all our adherence to the abuses of the world, whose innocence we maintain, we are still secretly persuaded that the world and its abuses are a path of perdition; we publicly justify what we condemn in private: we are the hypocrites of the world and of its pleasures; and, through a most deplorable destiny, our life passes away in dissembling with ourselves, and in obstinately determining to perish in spite of ourselves. And surely, says the apostle John, if our heart, notwithstanding all our self-blindness, cannot help already condemning us in secret, have we more indulgence to expect from the terrible and sovereign Judge of hearts than from our heart itself?

Study, therefore, my brethren, the law of God in your own conscience, and you will see that it is not more favourable than we to your passions; consult the feelings of your heart, and you will find that they perfectly accord with our maxims; listen to the voice of truth, which speaks within you, and you will admit, that we only repeat what it is continually whispering to you there: You have no occasion, says St. Augustin, to apply to learned men, in order to have the greater part of your doubts cleared up; go no farther than

yourselves for explanations and answers; apply to yourselves for what you have to do; listen to the decisions of your heart; follow the first impulse of your conscience, and you will always choose the side most conformable to the law of God: the first impression of the heart is always for the strictness of the divine law against the softenings of self-love: your conscience will always go farther, and will be more strict than yourselves; and, if you have occasion for our decisions, it will rather be in order to moderate the severity, than to expose the false indulgence of it.

Behold the first manner in which the law of God shall one day judge us: that law, which has been manifested in the conscience of the sinner, and appears as if born with him, shall rise up against him; our heart, marked with the seal of truth, shall be the witness to depose for our condemnation: our reason shall be opposed to our actions, our remorse to our manners, our speeches to our thoughts, our inward sentiments to our public proceedings, and ourselves to ourselves. Thus we bear, each of us, our condemnation in our own heart. The Lord will not bring other proof than ourselves, to determine the decision of our eternal reprobation; and the soul before the tribunal of God, says Tertullian, shall appear at the same time, both the criminal condemned, and the witness to testify against its crimes. He will have nothing to reply, continues this father. You knew the truth, will be said to him, and yet iniquitously withheld it; you acknowledged the happiness of those souls who seek only God, and yet sought him not yourselves; you drew a frightful picture of the world, of its vanities, its perfidies, and

its crimes, and yet were always its slave and blind worshipper: you inwardly respected the religion of your fathers, and yet made a deplorable boast of impiety: you secretly dreaded the judgments of God, and yet affected not to believe in him. In the bottom of your heart you rendered justice to the piety of the godly: you determined to resemble them at some future period; and yet wounded and persecuted them with your ridicule and censure: in a word, your reason has ever been for God, and your actions for the world.

O my God! to what height do not men carry their ingratitude and folly! Thou hast placed in us feelings inseparable from our being, which, by disturbing the false peace of our passions and errors, continually recall us to order and to the truth; and yet, through an illusive vanity, we make a boast of being tranquil in our errors; we glory in a peace which thy mercy is still willing to disturb; and, far from publishing the riches of thy grace upon our soul, which leaves us still open to the truth, we boast of an obstinacy and blindness which shall, sooner or later, be realized, and shall, at last, be the just punishment of an ingratitude and deceit so injurious to thy grace. The first proof therefore of the law of God, is its evidence on the conscience of the sinner; it is not less apparent from the simplicity of its rules.

PART II. Since man is the work of God, man can live only in conformity with the will of his author; and since God hath made man, and as his most perfect work, he can never leave him to live by chance upon the earth without manifesting to him his will; that is

to say, without pointing out to him what he owed to his Creator, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself. Therefore, in creating him, he imprinted on his being a living light, incessantly visible to his heart, which regulated all his duties. But men having become corrupt, and the abundance of iniquity, which had prevailed over the earth, (unable, it is true, to efface that light entirely from the heart,) no longer permitting them to reflect, or to consult it, and apparently no longer even maintaining itself in them, unless to render them more inexcusable; God, whose mercies seem to become more abundant in proportion as the wickedness of men increases, caused to be engraven, on tables of stone, that law which nature, that is to say, which himself had engraven on our hearts: he placed before our eyes the law which we bear within us, in order to recall us to ourselves. Nevertheless, the people, who were its first depositories, having again disfigured it by interpretations which adulterated its purity, Jesus Christ, the wisdom and the light of God, came at last upon the earth to restore it to its original beauty; to purge it from the alterations of the synagogue; to dissipate the obscurities which a false learning and human traditions had spread through it; to lay open all its sublimity; to apply its rules to our wants; and, in leaving to us his gospel, no longer to leave an excuse, either to the ignorance or to the wickedness of those who violate its precepts.

Nevertheless, the second pretext which is opposed in the world to the evidence of the law of God, is the pretended ambiguity of its rules: we are accused of making the gospel say whatever we wish; men dis-

pute, find answers to every thing, and spread obscurities through all; and they darken the law in such a manner, that the world itself believes it has the gospel on its side.

Now I say, that, besides the evidence of the conscience, the law of God is also evident in the simplicity of its rules; and, consequently, that sinners, who thus wish to justify their iniquitous ways, will one day be overthrown, both by the testimony of their own heart, and by the evidence of the holy rules.

Yes, my brethren, the law of God, says the prophet, is pure, enlightening the eyes even of those who would wish to conceal it from themselves. In effect, Jesus Christ, in coming himself to give us a law of life and truth for the regulation of our manners and duties, and the evidence of which could not be too great, would undoubtedly never have meant to leave obscurities in it capable of deluding us, and of favouring passions which he expressly came to overthrow. Human laws may be liable to these inconveniencies: the mind of man, which hath invented them, being unable to foresee all, hath also been unable to obviate all the difficulties which might one day arise in the minds of other men, with regard to the strength of his expressions, and even the nature of his rules. But the spirit of God, the author of the holy rules held out in the gospel, hath foreseen all the doubts which the human mind could oppose to his law: he hath read, in the hearts of all men to come, the obscurities which their corruption might shed over the nature of his rules: he hath consequently concerted them in a manner so divine and so intelligible, so simple and yet so sublime, that the

most ignorant, equally as the most learned, can never misconstrue his intentions, and be ignorant of the ways of eternal life.

It is true, that sacred obscurities sometimes conceal the incomprehensible mysteries of faith; but the moral rules are explicit and precise; the duties are there evident; and nothing can be more clear, or less equivocal, than the precepts of Jesus Christ. Not but that doubts and difficulties may spring up in the detail of the obligations; the union of a thousand different circumstances may obscure the law, so that it may sometimes escape the most learned; nor can all the infinite duties of stations and conditions, be so decided in the gospel, that mistakes will not often take place.

But I say, (and I intreat of you to follow the course of these reflections which to me appear of the utmost consequence, and to comprise all the moral rules,) I say, in the first place, That if, upon the detail of duties, the letter of the law be sometimes dubious, the spirit of it is rarely so: that it is easily seen to which side the gospel inclines, and to what the analogy and ruling spirit of its maxims lead us: I say, that they mutually clear up each other; that they all bear upon the same end; that they are like so many rays, which, uniting in one centre, form so great a lustre that it is impossible longer to mistake them; that there are principal rules which serve to elucidate every particular difficulty; and, lastly, that if the law appear sometimes equivocal to us, the intention of the legislator, by which we ought to interpret it, never leaves room for either doubt or mistake.

Thus, you who live at court, where ambition is, as it were, the virtue of persons of your rank; you would wish to know if it be a crime ardently to long for the honours and prosperities of the earth, to be never satisfied with your station, continually to wish for advancement, and to connect with that single desire, all your views, all your proceedings, all your cares, and the whole foundation of your life. In answer to this, you are told in the gospel, that your heart ought to be where your treasure is; that is to say, in the desire and in the hope of eternal riches; and that the Christian is not of this world. Decide therefore the difficulty yourselves.

You ask, if continual sports, amusements, theatres, and so many other pleasures, so innocent in the eyes of the world, ought to be banished from the Christian life. You are there told, that blessed are they who weep; but woe unto those who laugh, and who receive their consolation in this world. Follow the spirit of this rule, and see to what it leads.

You enquire, if, while you live in the world, you ought not to live like the world; if we would wish to condemn almost all men who live like you; and if, in order to serve God, it be necessary to affect singularities which excite the ridicule of other men. You are there told, that we are not to conform to this corrupt age; that it is impossible to please men and to be at the same time the servant of Jesus Christ; and that the multitude is always the party of the reprobate. You have now to say whether the answer be explicit.

You doubt, if, after having pardoned your enemy,

you be also obliged to see him, to serve him, to assist him with your wealth and credit; and if it be not more equitable to reserve your favours and preferences for your friends. You are there told: do good to those who have wished evil to you; speak well of those who calumniate you; love those who hate you. Enter into the spirit of this precept, and say if it doth not shed a light over your doubt, which instantly clears it up, and dissipates it.

Lastly, propose as many doubts as you please upon duties, and it will be easy for you to decide them by the spirit of the law, if the letter say nothing of them; for a literal adherence to the law is destruction, says the apostle: that is to say, to stop there, to consider as a duty only what is literally marked, to stop at these rude limits, and to enter no farther into the principle and into the spirit which vivifies it, is to be a Jew, and to be willing to be self-deceived. No longer then, my brethren, let us be told, when we condemn so many abuses, which you, without scruple, allow yourselves, "But the gospel says nothing of them." Ah! the gospel says every thing to those who wish to understand it: the gospel leaves nothing undecided to whoever loves the law of God: the gospel furnishes sufficient answers to those who examine it only for instruction; and it goes so much the farther, and says so much the more, when, without stopping to regulate a particular detail, it regulates the passions themselves; when without detailing every action, it tends to repress those inclinations which are the sources of them; and when, without confining itself to certain external circumstances of the manners, it proposes to

us, as rules of duty, only self-denial, hatred of the world, love of suffering, contempt for whatever takes place, and the whole extent of its crucifying maxims.

I say, in the second place, That it is not the obscurity of the law, but our own passions, still dear to us, which give rise to all our doubts with regard to our duties; that it is the worldly souls who find most difficulty and most obscurity in the moral rules; that nothing appears clear to those who would wish that nothing were so; that every thing appears doubtful to those who have an interest in its being so: I say, with St. Augustin, that it is a willing spirit alone which makes us understand the precepts; that unless we love the divine rules, they can never be thoroughly known; that we enter into the truth only through charity; and that the sincere desire of salvation is the grand solver of all difficulties: I say, that faithful and fervent souls have rarely any thing to oppose to the law of God; and that their doubts are rather pious alarms upon holy actions, than pretexts and difficulties to authorise profane ones.

Men have learned to doubt upon the moral rules, only since they have wished to connect them with their iniquitous passions. Alas! every thing almost was decided for the first believers: in these happy ages, we are not aware, that the first pastors of the church had many difficulties to resolve upon the detail of their duties: those immense volumes, which decide their doubts by endless resolutions, have appeared only with the corruption of manners: in proportion as believers have had more passions to satisfy, they have had more doubts to propose; it hath been ne-

cessary to multiply volumes upon volumes, in order to resolve difficulties which cupidity alone has formed; difficulties already resolved in the gospel, and upon which the first ages of faith would have been scandalised, had they dared to form even a doubt. Our age, still more dissolute than those which preceded it, has beheld these enormous collections of cases and resolutions increasing and multiplying to infinity: the most incontestable rules of morality enacted by Jesus Christ, are become almost problems; there is no duty upon which corruption hath not had difficulties to propose, and for which a false learning hath not found alleviations: every thing has been agitated, contested, and put in doubt: the mind of man hath been seen quibbling with the spirit of God, and substituting human doctrines in place of that doctrine which Jesus Christ hath brought us from heaven; and although we pretend not universally to blame those pious and able men, who have left us these laborious masses of decisions, yet it is to be wished that the church had never called in such aids; and we cannot help looking upon them as remedies which are themselves become diseases, and as the sad fruits of the necessity of the times, of the depravity of manners, and of the decay of truth among men.

Doubts upon our duties arise, therefore, from the corruption of our hearts, much more than from the obscurities of the divine rules. The light of the law, says St. Augustin, resembles that of the sun; but vainly doth it shine, glitter, and enlighten others; the blind are unaffected by it: now, every sinner is in that respect blind; the light is near him, surrounds him,

penetrates him, enters from every quarter into his soul; but he himself is always far from the light. Purify your heart, continues that holy father; remove from it the fatal bandage of the passions; then shall you clearly see all your duties, and all your doubts shall vanish. Thus we continually see, that, when touched with grace, man begins to adopt serious measures for eternity, his eyes are opened to a thousand truths, which, till then, he had concealed from himself: in proportion as his passions diminish, his lights increase; he is astonished by what means he could so long have shut his eyes upon truths which now appear to him so evident and so incontestable; and, far from a sacred guide having then occasion to dispute, and to maintain against him the interests of the law of God, his prudence is required to conceal, as I may say, from that contrite soul, the whole extent and all the terrors of the holy truths; to quiet him on the horror of past irregularities, and to moderate the fears into which he is thrown by the novelty of the light which has broken in upon him. It is not then the divine rule which is less obscure, it is the soul which frees itself from, and quits its blindness; it is not the law of God which becomes more evident, it is the eyes of the heart which are opened to its lustre; in a word, it is not the gospel, but the sinner who is changed.

And an additional proof of what I advance is, that, upon those points of the law where no particular passion or interest blinds us, we are equitable and clear-sighted. A miser, who hides from himself the rules of faith, upon the insatiable love of riches, clearly

sees the maxims which condemn ambition or luxury. A voluptuary, who tries to justify to himself the weakness of his inclinations, gives no quarter to the mean desires, and to the sordid attachments of avarice. A man, infatuated by exaltation and fortune, and who considers the eternal exertions which he is under the necessity of making, in order to succeed, as weighty and serious cares, and alone worthy his birth and his name, comprehends all the unworthiness of a life of amusement and pleasure, and perceives clearly that a man, born with a name, degrades and dishonours himself by laziness and indolence. A woman, seized with the rage of play, yet otherwise regular in her conduct, is inveterate against the slightest faults of deportment, and continually justifies the innocence of excessive play, by contrasting it with irregularities of another description, from which she finds herself free. Another, on the contrary, intoxicated with her person and with her beauty, totally engrossed by her deplorable passions, considers that obstinate perseverance in gaming as a kind of disease and derangement of the mind, and sees in her own shameful pursuits nothing but an innocent weakness and involuntary inclinations, which we find in our hearts.

Review all the passions, and you will see that, in proportion as we are exempted from some one, we see and condemn it in others; we know the rules which forbid it; we go even to an extreme against others, in the observance of duties which interest not our own failings, and carry our severity beyond even the rule itself. The Pharisees, who were so well acquainted with, and so severe upon the guilt of the

adultress, and the punishments attached by the law, to that infamous infidelity, saw not their own pride, their hypocrisy, their implacable hatred, and their secret envy of Jesus Christ. The obscurities of the law are only in our own heart; and we never begin to doubt upon our duties, until we begin to love those maxims which oppose them.

I say, in the third place, you believe that the gospel is not so express as we pretend, upon the greater part of the rules prescribed to you; that we carry its severity to excess, and make it to say whatever we please. Listen to its own words, my brethren; we consent that, of all the duties prescribed to you by it, you shall think yourselves obliged to observe only those which are marked in terms so precise and clear, that it is impossible to mistake or misconstrue them: more is not required of you, and we free you from all the rest. Hear it then: "And whosoever doth "not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my "disciple. Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh "not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. The "kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the vio-"lent take it by force. Except ye repent, ye shall "all likewise perish. Ye cannot serve God and "mammon. Wo unto you that are full; for ye shall "hunger. Wo unto you that laugh now; for ye shall "mourn and weep. Blessed are ye that weep now; "for ye shall laugh. He that loveth his father, his "wife, his children, yea, and his life also, better than "me, is not worthy of me. I say unto you, that ye "shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice;

"and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be "turned into joy."

Are these my words, my brethren? Do I deceive you by an excess of severity, do I add to the gospel, and bring you only my own thoughts? Weak creature that I am, I have occasion myself for indulgence; and if in the weakness of my own heart, I were to construe the doctrine which I announce to you, alas! I should speak to you only the language of man: I would tell you that God is too good to punish inclinations which are born, it would appear, with us; that, to love God, it is not necessary to hate one's self; that, when rich, we ought to enjoy our wealth, and allow ourselves every gratification. This is the language which I would hold; for man, delivered up to himself, can speak only this language of flesh and blood. But would you believe me, as I have already asked; would you respect my ministry; would you look upon me as an angel from heaven, who should come to announce to you this new gospel?

That of Jesus Christ speaks another language to you; I have related to you only his own divine words; these are the duties which he prescribes to you in clear and express terms. We consent that you should confine your whole piety to these limits, and that you leave all the rest as doubtful, or, at least, commanded in terms less clear, and more susceptible of favourable interpretations. Reckon among your duties, only these holy and incontestable rules; we exact nothing more; limit yourselves to performing what they prescribe to you; and you will see that you shall do more than we even demand of you; and

that the most common and most familiar maxims of the gospel go infinitely farther than all our discourses.

I have to remark, in the fourth place, that, if the world differs upon the most incontestable duties of Christian piety, it is because the gospel is a book unknown to the greatest part of believers; it is because through a deplorable abuse, a whole life is passed in acquiring vain learning, equally useless to man, to his happiness, and to his eternity; and because that book is never read, in which is contained the knowledge of salvation, the truth which is to deliver us, the light which is to conduct us, the ground of our hopes, the testimony of our immortality, the consolation of our exile, and the aid of our pilgrimage: it is because, on entering into the world, care is taken to present us with those books, in which are explained the rules of that profession to which we are allotted; and the book of the law, in which the rules of the profession of the Christian are contained, that profession which shall survive all others, which alone is necessary, and the only one which shall accompany us into eternity; that book, I say, is neglected, and enters not into the plan of studies which ought to occupy our earlier years; lastly, it is because fabulous and lascivious histories childishly amuse our leisure; and the history of God's wonders and mercies upon men, filled with events so great, so weighty, and so interesting, which ought to be the sole occupation, and the whole consolation of our life, does not appear to us worthy even of our curiosity.

I am not surprised, after this, if we have continual occasion to maintain the truths of the gospel against the

abuses and the prejudices of the world; if we are listened to with the same surprise, when we announce the most common truths of the Christian morality, as if we announced the belief and the mysteries of those distant and savage nations, whose countries and manners are hardly known; and if the doctrine of Jesus Christ find the same opposition at present in the human mind that it experienced at the birth of faith; it is because there are Christians to whom the book of the gospel is almost equally unknown as it then was to the heathen; Christians who scarcely know whether Jesus Christ be come to bring laws to men, and who cannot, for a single moment, support, without weariness, the reading of that divine book, the rules of which are so sublime, the promises so consoling, and the beauty and divine philosophy of which, the pagans themselves, who embraced faith, so much admired. Read, therefore, my brethren, the holy books, and read them with that spirit of faith, of submission, and of trust, which the church exacts, and you will soon be as well acquainted with your duties, and with the moral rules, as the doctors themselves who teach you.

And, indeed, my brethren, whence comes it, I pray you, that the first believers carried so far the purity of manners, and the holiness of Christianity? Were other maxims announced to them than those which we announce to you? Was another gospel preached to them, more clear and more explicit than that which we preach to you? They were, nevertheless, idolatrous and dissolute nations, who had brought, to the truths of faith, all the prejudices of the superstitious, and of the most infamous pleasures authorized even by their worship.

Did the gospel contain the smallest obscurities favourable to the passions, it surely ought to have been those first disciples of faith who should have made the mistake. How did it happen, therefore, that they never proposed to the apostles and to their successors the same difficulties which you continually find, in support of the abuses of the world, and of the interests of the passions? Whence comes it, that, with more inclinations and more prejudices in favour of pleasures, than we possess, those blessed believers at once comprehended how far, in order to obey the gospel, it was necessary to deny them to themselves?

Ah! it was because, night and day, they had the book of the law in their hands: it was because patience, and the consolation of the scriptures, were the sweetest occupation of their faith; it was because the letters of the holy apostles, and the relation of the life and of the maxims of Jesus Christ, were the sole bond, and the daily conversations of those infant churches; in a word, it is because whatever regards the duties, is quickly decided by whoever reads the gospel.

Lastly, I say, that even admitting some obscurities to exist, doth not the law of God become clear by the instruction of the ministry? The Christian pulpits announce to you the purity of the holy maxims; your pastors publicly preach them; men, full of zeal and of knowledge, convey them down to posterity, in works worthy of the better times of the church: never had the piety of believers more aids; no age was ever more enlightened, or better knew the spirit of faith and the whole extent of its duties. We no longer live in those ages of ignorance, in which the divine rules subsisted

only in the abuses which had adulterated them; in which the ministry was often an occasion of error and of scandal for believers; and in which the priest was considered as more enlightened, whenever he was more superstitious than his people.

It would seem, O my God! that, in order to render us more inexcusable, the knowledge of the truth increases on the one side, in proportion as the wickedness of man increases on the other; in proportion as the manners become corrupted, the divine rules become more evident; in proportion as faith becomes languid, it is cleared up and purified; like those fires, which, in expiring, give a momentary flash, and never display their lustre with such brilliancy as when on the eve of being extinguished.

Not that we do not still find among us many blind guides and prophets who announce their own dreams. But the snare is to be dreaded only by those who are willing to be deceived: when sincerely inclined to seek the Lord, we soon find the hand which knows how to lead us to him: it is not then, properly speaking, the false guides who lead us astray, it is ourselves who seek them, because we wish to err with them; they are not the first authors of our ruin, they are only the encouragers of it; they do not lead us into the path of perdition, they only leave us there; and we are already determined to perish before we apply for their suffrage. In effect, we sensibly feel ourselves the danger and the imprudence of the choice we make; even the more we find the oracle complying, the more we mistrust his lights; the more he respects our passions, the less we respect his ministry; he is frequently made the sub-

ject even of our derision; we turn into ridicule that very indulgence which we have sought; we boast of having found a protector so convenient for human weakness; and, through a blindness which cannot be mentioned without tears, the eternal salvation of the soul is confided to a man who is believed unworthy, not only of respect, but even of attention and decency; like those Israelites who, a moment after having bowed the knee to the golden calf, and expected from it their salvation and their deliverance, broke it in pieces with disgrace, and reduced it to ashes.

But, after all, should even the ignorance or the weakness of ministers be a cause of error, the examples of the holy undeceive you. You see what, from the beginning, hath been the path of those who have obtained the promised rewards, and whose memory and holy toils we still honour upon the earth: you see that none of them have accomplished their salvation by that way which the world boasts of as being so safe and so innocent: you see that all the holy have repented, crucified the flesh, despised the world with its pleasures and maxims: you see that ages, so opposite to each other for their manners and customs, have never made any change in the manners of the just; that the holy of the first times were the same as those of the last; that countries, even the most dissimilar in their genius and manners, have produced holy men, all resembling each other; that those of the most distant climates, and the most different from our own, resemble those of our nation; that, in every tongue and in every tribe, they have all been the same; lastly, that their situations have been different; that some have wrought out

their salvation in obscurity, others in elevation; some in poverty, others in abundance; some amid the dissipation of dignities and public cares, others in silence and in the calm of solitude: in a word, some in the cottage, others on the throne; but that the cross, mortification and self-denial, hath been the common path of all.

What then art thou, to pretend to reach heaven by other paths? and who flatterest thyself that, in that crowd of illustrious servants of the living God, thou alone shalt be privileged. My God! with what lustre hast thou not surrounded the truth, in order to render man inexcusable! His conscience shews it to him; thy holy law guards it for him; the voice of the church makes it resound in his ears; the example of the holy incessantly places it before his eyes; every thing rises up against guilt; all take the side of thy holy law against his false peace; from every quarter proceed rays of light which bear the truth even to the bottom of his soul: no place, no situation can protect him from those divine sparks emitted from thy bosom, which every where pursue him, and which, while they enlighten, torment him: the truth, which ought to deliver him, renders him unhappy; and, unwilling to love its light, he is forced, before hand, to feel its just severity.

What then, my dear hearer, prevents the truth from triumphing in your heart? Wherefore do you change, into an inexhaustible source of remorse, those lights which ought to be, the whole consolation of your sorrows? Since, by a consequence of the riches of God's mercy upon your soul, you cannot succeed, like so many impious and hardened hearts, in stifling that in-

ternal monitor which incessantly recalls you to order and duty, why will you so obstinately withstand the happiness of your lot? Why make so many efforts to defend you from yourself, so many starts and flights to shun yourself? Reconcile, at last, your heart with your reason, your conscience with your manners, yourself with the law of God; behold the only secret of attaining to that peace of heart which you seek. Turn yourself on every side, you must always come to that. Observance of the law is the true happiness of man; it is deceiving himself to look upon it as a yoke; that alone places the heart at liberty. Whatever favours our passions, sharpens our ills, increases our troubles, multiplies our bonds, and aggravates our slavery; the law of God alone, in repressing them, places us in order, quiets, cures, and delivers us. Such is the destiny of sinful man, to be incapable of happiness here below, but by overcoming his passions; to attain by violence alone to the true pleasures of the heart, and afterwards to that eternal peace prepared for those who shall have loved the law of God.

SERMON XXV.

ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE LAW OF GOD.

JOHN viii. 46.

And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

IT is not enough to have defended the evidence of the law of God against the affected ignorance of the sinners who violate it; it is necessary likewise to establish its immutability against all the pretexts which seem to authorise mankind to absolve themselves from its holy rules.

Jesus Christ is not satisfied with announcing to the Pharisees, that the truth which they knew shall one day judge them; that it is in vain they conceal it from themselves; and that the guilt of knowing and contemning the truth, would be for ever upon their heads. It is through the evidence of the law that he at first recalls them to their own conscience; he afterwards accuses them of having aimed a blow even at its immutability; of substituting human customs and traditions in place of its eternal rules; of accommo-

dating them to times, to circumstances, and to interests; and declares to them that, even to the end of the world, a single iota shall not be changed in his law; that heaven and earth shall pass away, but his law and his holy word shall for ever be the same.

Such, my brethren, are the abuses which still reign among us against the law of God. I have shewn you that, in spite of the doubts and obscurities which our lusts have spread over our duties, the light of the law, always superior to our passions, has dissipated, in spite of ourselves, those obscurities, and that we were never hearty in the transgressions which we tried to justify to ourselves. But it is little to wish, like the Pharisees, to darken the evidence of the law; like them, we also strike at its immutability; and, as if the law of God could change with the manners of the age, the difference of conditions, the necessity of situations, we believe that we can accommodate it to these three different circumstances, and find in them pretexts, either to mitigate its severity, or altogether to violate its precepts.

1st, The heart of man is indeed changeable; every age sees new customs spring up among us, and time and habit always determine our manners: now, the law of God is immutable in its duration, always the same in all times and in all places; and, in consequence of this first character of immutability, ought alone to be the constant and perpetual rule of our manners.

2dly, The heart of man is full of vanity; whatever levels us with the rest of men, wounds our pride; we love distinction and preference; we believe that, in

the elevation of rank and birth, we find privileges against the law: now, the law of God is immutable in its operations; it levels all stations and all conditions; it is the same for the great and for the humble, for the prince and for the subject; and, by reason of this second character of immutability, it ought to unite in the same duties, that variety of stations and conditions which spreads so much inequality over our manners and rules.

Lastly, Man connects every thing with himself; he persuades himself that his interests ought to be preferred to the law and to the interests of God himself; the slightest inconveniences are sufficient in his eyes, to induce him to trespass against the divine rule: now, the law of God is immutable in all situations of life; and, by reason of this last character of immutability, there is neither perplexity, nor inconveniency, nor apparent necessity, which can absolve us from its precepts.

Thus are the three pretexts overthrown, which the world opposes to the immutability of the law of God, the pretext of manners and customs; the pretext of rank and birth; the pretext of situations and inconveniences. The law of God is immutable in its duration; therefore, manners and customs can never change it: the law of God is immutable in its extent; therefore, the difference of ranks and of conditions leaves it every where the same: the law of God is immutable in all situations; therefore, inconveniences, and perplexities, can never justify the slightest transgression of it.

PART I. One of the most urgent and most usual subjects of reproach which the first supporters of religion, formerly made to the heathens, was the instability of their moral system, and the continual fluctuations of their doctrine. As the fulness of truth was not in vain philosophy, and as they drew not their lights, said Tertullian, from that sovereign reason which enlightens all minds, and is the immutable teacher of truth, but from the corruption of their heart, and the vanity of their thoughts; they qualified good and evil according to their caprices, and, among them, vice and virtue were almost arbitrary names. Nevertheless, continues this father, the most inseparable character of truth, is that of being always the same: good and evil take their immutable character from that of God himself, whom they glorify or insult; his wisdom, his holiness, his righteousness, are the only eternal rules of our manners; and it belongs not to men, at their pleasure, to change what men have not established, and what is more ancient than men themselves.

Now, it was not surprising that morality had nothing determinate, in the heathen schools, delivered up as they were to the pride, and to the variations of the human mind; it was vanity, and not truth, which made philosophers; their rules changed with every age; new times brought new laws: in a word, their doctrine did not change their manners; it was the change of manners which drew after it that of their doctrine.

But it is astonishing, that Christians, who have received from heaven the eternal and immutable law which regulates their manners, believe it to be equally

changeable with the morality of philosophers; they persuade themselves that the rigorous duties, which the gospel at first prescribed to the primitive ages of the church, are softened with the relaxation of manners, and are no longer made for the weakness and the corruption of our age.

The gospel, my brethren, the law of Jesus Christ, is immutable in its duration: seeing every thing change around it, it alone changes not; the duties which it prescribes to us, founded upon the wants and upon the nature of man, are, like it, of all times and of all places. Every thing changes upon the earth, because every thing partakes of the mutability of its origin; empires and states have their rise and their fall; arts and sciences fall or spring up with the course of ages; customs continually change with climates and the taste of the people; from the height of his immutability, God seems to sport with human affairs, by leaving them in an eternal revolution: succeeding ages will destroy what we, with so much anxiety, rear up; we destroy what our fathers had thought worthy of an eternal duration; and, in order to teach us in what estimation we ought to hold things here below, God permitteth that they have nothing determinate or solid, but that very inconstancy which incessantly agitates them.

But, amid all the changes of manners and ages, the law of God always remains the immutable rule of ages and of manners. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but the holy words of the law shall ever remain: such as the first believers received them at the birth of faith, such have we them at present, such shall our descen-

dants one day receive them, such shall the blessed in heaven eternally love and adore them. The devotion or the licentiousness of ages diminish nothing from their indulgence, or from their severity; the zeal or the complaisance of men, renders them neither more austere, nor more accommodating. The intolerant rigour, or the excessive relaxation of opinions and tenets, alters not the wise sobriety of their rules; and they form that eternal gospel which the angel, in the Revelation, from the beginning announces from on high in heaven, to every tongue and to every nation.

Nevertheless, my brethren, when, in the manners of the primitive believers, we sometimes shew you their fulfilment of all the duties of the gospel, their disengagement from the world, their absence from theatres and public pleasures, their assiduity in the churches, the modesty and the decency of their dress, their charity for their brethren, their indifference for all perishable things, their continual desire of being re-united to Jesus Christ; in a word, their simple, retired, and mortified life, sustained by fervent prayer, and by the consolation of the holy books, and such, in effect, as the gospel prescribes to all the disciples of faith; when you are shewn, I say, these ancient models, in order to make you feel, by the difference between the primitive manners and yours, how distant you are from the kingdom of God; far from being alarmed at finding yourselves so unlike them, that it could hardly be believed that you were disciples of the same Master, and followers of the same law; you reproach us with continually recalling, even to weariness, those primitive times, of never speaking but of the primitive church,

as if it were possible to govern our manners, by manners of which every trace hath long been done away, manners impracticable at present among us, and which time and habit have universally abolished. You say, that men must be taken as they are; that it were to be wished that the primitive fervour had been kept up in the church; but that every thing becomes relaxed and weakened through time, and that, to pretend to bring us back to the manners of the primitive ages, is not holding out means of salvation, but is merely announcing that nobody can now pretend to it.

But I ask you, in the first place, my brethren, If time, which has so much adulterated the purity of Christianity, has adulterated that of the gospel? Are the divine rules become more pliable and more favourable to the passions, because men are become more sensual and more voluptuous? And hath the relaxation of manners softened the maxims of Jesus Christ? When he hath foretold in the gospel, that, in the latter times, that is to say, in the ages in which we have the misfortune to live, faith should scarcely be found upon the earth; that his name should hardly be known there; that his maxims should be destroyed; that the duties of men should be incompatible with their customs; and that the just themselves should allow themselves almost to be infected by the universal contagion, and to be dragged away by the torrent of example; hath he then added, that, in order to accommodate himself to the corruption of these latter times, he would relax something of the severity of his gospel; that he would consent that customs, established by the ignorance and the licentiousness of the age, should succeed to the rules

and duties of his doctrine; that he would then exact of his disciples infinitely less than he exacted at the birth of faith; and that his kingdom, which, at first, was promised only to activity, should then be granted to indolence and laziness? Hath he added this, I ask? On the contrary, he warns his disciples that then, in these latter times, it will, more than ever, be necessary to pray, to fast, to retire to the mountains, in order to shun the general corruption: he warns them, that wo unto those who shall then remain exposed amid the world; that those alone shall be safe who shall divest themselves of all, and who shall fly from the cities; and he concludes, by exhorting them once more to watch and pray without ceasing, in order that they may not be included in the general condemnation.

And truly, my brethren, the more disorders augment, the more ought piety to be fervent and watchful; the more we are surrounded with dangers, the more doth prayer, retirement, and mortification, become necessary to us. The licentiousness of the existing manners adds new obligations to those of our fathers; and, far from the path of salvation having become more easy than in former times, we shall perish with a moderate virtue, which, supported then by the common example, would perhaps have been sufficient to secure our salvation.

Besides, my brethren, I ask you, in the second place, Do you really believe that the rigorous precepts of the gospel, those maxims of the cross, of violence, of self-denial, of contempt for the world, have been made only for the primitive ages of faith? Do you believe that Jesus Christ hath destined all the rigours of his doctrine for those chaste, innocent, charitable, and fervent

men, who lived in the happy times of the church; men who denied themselves every pleasure, the primitive heroes of religion, who, almost all, preserved, even to the end, the grace of regeneration which had made them Christians? What, my brethren! would Jesus Christ have rewarded their zeal and their fidelity only by aggravating their yoke, and have reserved all his indulgence for the corrupt of our age? Would Jesus Christ have made strict laws in relation to reserve, modesty, and retirement, only for those Christian females of the early ages who renounced all to please him; who divided themselves only with the Lord and their husbands; who, shut up in the inclosure of their houses, brought up their children in faith and in piety? And would he exact less at present of those sensual, voluptuous, and worldly women, who continually wound our eyes by the indecency of their dress, and who corrupt the heart by the looseness of their manners, and by the snares which they lay for innocence? Where then would be that so much vaunted equity and wisdom of the Christian morality? More would then be exacted of him who owes less. The transgressions of the law would then absolve from severity those who violate it. It would suffice to have passions, to be entitled to gratify them. The way of heaven would be rendered easy to sinners, while all its roughness would be kept for the just. And the more vices men have, the less would they have occasion for virtues.

Again allow me, my brethren, to add, in the last place, that if the change of manners could change the divine rules, if customs could justify abuses, the eter-

nal law of God should then accommodate itself to the inconstancy of the times, and to the ridiculous taste of men! a gospel would then be necessary for every age and for every nation; for our customs were not established in the times of our fathers, and undoubtedly they shall not pass to our last descendants; they are not common to all the nations, who, like us, worship Jesus Christ. These customs, therefore, cannot either become our rule, or change it; for the divine rule is of all times and of all places: new manners, therefore, do not form a new gospel, seeing that we would anathematise even an angel who should come to announce to us a new one, and that the gospel would be no longer but a human law, and one little to be trusted if it could change with men: the rules and duties therefore are not to be judged by manners and customs, but the manners and customs are to be judged by the duties and rules; it is the law of God, therefore, which ought to be the constant rule of the times, and not the variation of times to become even the rule of the law of God.

Say then no longer, my brethren, that the times are altered; for the law of God, is not. That you cannot reform manners universally established; for you are not charged with the reformation of the universe: change yourselves; save your own souls with which you are entrusted; this is all that is exacted of you: lastly, that the Christians of the primitive times had either more force or more grace than we: ah! they had more faith, more constancy, more love for Jesus Christ, more contempt for the world: this is all that distinguished them from us.

Have we not the same sources of grace as they, the same ministry, the same altar, the same victim? Do not the mercies of the Lord flow with the same abundance upon his church? Have we not still among us pure and holy souls, who renew the fervour and faith of the primitive times, and who are living proofs of the possibility of the duties, and of the mercies of the Lord upon his people? "Tell us no longer, then," says the spirit of God, "that the former days were "better than these; for thou dost not enquire wisely "concerning this." To follow Jesus Christ, hath always cost much: in all ages, it hath been necessary to bear his cross, not to conform to the corrupt age, and to live as strangers upon the earth: in all times, the holy have had the same passions as we to resist, the same abuses to shun, the same snares to dread, the same obstacles to surmount: and, if there be any difference here, it is, that, in former times, it was not merely arbitrary customs which they had to shun, nor the ridicule of the world which they had only to dread, in declaring for Jesus Christ; it was the most cruel punishments to which they were compelled to expose themselves; it was the power of the Cesars, and the rage of tyrants, which they were obliged to hold in scorn; it was superstitions, become respectable through their antiquity, countenanced by the laws of the empire, and by the consent of almost all the world, which they had to shake off: It was, in a word, the whole universe which they had to arm against themselves. But the faith of these pious men was stronger than punishments, than tyrants, than the Cesars, than the whole world: and yet our faith can-

not hold out against the absurdity of custom, or the puerility of derision; and the gospel, which could formerly make martyrs, can scarcely at present form a believer. The law of God is then immutable in its duration; it is always the same in all times and in all places; but it is likewise immutable in its extent, and the same for all stations and conditions.

PART II. The most essential character of the law of Jesus Christ, is, that it unites, under the same rules, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Barbarian, the great and the people, the prince and the subject; in it there is no longer respect of persons. The law of Moses, at least in its customs and ceremonies, was given only to a single people; but Jesus Christ is an universal Legislator; his law, as well as his death, is for all men. He came, to make of all people only one people; of all stations and of all conditions only one body: the same spirit animates it, the same laws govern it: different functions may be exercised, and different places, more or less honourable, be occupied; but the same spring rules all the members of it. All those hateful distinctions, which formerly divided men, are destroyed by the church: that holy law knows neither poor nor rich; neither noble nor base born; neither master nor slave; it acknowledges in men only the title of believer, which levels them all: it distinguishes them not by their names, nor by their offices, but by their virtues; and the greatest in its sight are those who are the most holy.

Nevertheless, a second mistake, very common with regard to the immutability of the law of God, is the

persuasion that it changes and becomes softened in favour of rank and birth; that its obligations are less rigid for persons born to elevation; and that the obstacles, which high places and the manners attached to grandeur throw in the way of the observance of the strict duties of the gospel, and which render the practice of them almost impossible to the great, likewise render their transgression more innocent. They figure to themselves that the abuses, permitted, in all times, by custom to the great, are likewise accorded to them by the law of God, and that there is a path of salvation for them different from that of the people. Thence it arises, that all the laws of the church are violated; the days consecrated to abstinence are confounded with other days, and looked upon as privileges refused to the vulgar, and reserved solely for rank and birth: thence it happens that the great live only for the senses, are attentive only to satisfy them, refuse nothing to taste, to vanity, to curiosity, to idleness, to ambition, and in a word make a God of themselves; the same prosperity, which facilitates all these excesses, excuses and justifies them.

But, my brethren, as I have already said, the gospel is the law of all men: high and low, you have all promised, upon the sacred fonts, to observe it. The church, in receiving you into the number of her children, hath not held out to the great other vows and other rules, than to the common people: you have all made there the same promises; all sworn, in the face of the altars, to observe the same gospel. The church hath not then demanded of you, if, by your birth according to the flesh, you were great, or of low de-

scent; but if, by your regeneration in Jesus Christ, you meant to be faithful, and to engage yourself to follow his law: upon the vow which you have made of it, she hath placed the holy gospel upon your head, in order to mark that you submitted yourself to that sacred yoke.

Now, my brethren, all the duties of the gospel are reduced to two points. Some are ordained in order to resist and weaken that mass of corruption which we bear from our birth; others in order to perfect that first grace of the Christian which we have received in baptism; that is to say, the one in order to destroy in us the old Adam; the others in order to make Jesus Christ to grow there. Violence, self-denial, and mortification, are contained in the first: prayer, retirement, vigilance, contempt for the world, desire of invisible riches, are comprised in the second: this is the whole gospel. Now, I ask you, what is there in these two descriptions of duties from which rank or birth can absolve you?

Ought you to pray less than other believers? Have you fewer favours to ask than they, fewer obstacles to overcome, fewer snares to avoid, fewer desires to resist? Alas! the more you are exalted, the more do dangers augment, the more do occasions of sin spring up under your feet, the more is the world beloved, the more doth every thing favour your passions, the more doth every thing militate against your good desires; is it in a situation so dangerous in regard to salvation that you find privileges which render it more mild and agreeable. The more, therefore, you are exalted, the more doth mortification become necessary to you;

for, the more pleasures corrupt your heart, the more is vigilance necessary, because dangers are more frequent; the more ought faith to be lively, because every thing around you weakens and extinguishes it; the more ought prayer to be continual, because the grace, you need for your support, ought to be more powerful; the more firm ought your humility of heart to be, because the attachment to things here below are more unavoidable: lastly, the more you are exalted, the more doth salvation become difficult to you; this is the only privilege you can expect from elevation. Also, thou often warnest us, great God, that thy kingdom is only for the poor and the lowly: thou speakest of the difficulty of salvation for the great and the powerful, in terms which would seem to deprive them of all hope of pretending to it, if we knew not that thou wishest the salvation of all men, and that thy grace is still more powerful for our sanctification, than prosperity for our corruption.

And surely, my brethren, if grandeur and elevation were to render our condition more fortunate and more favourable with regard to salvation, in vain would the doctrine of Jesus Christ teach us to dread grandeur and human prosperities; in vain would we be told: blessed are they who weep, and who suffer here below; and woe unto those who laugh now, for they shall mourn and weep, and unto those who are rich, for they have received their consolation; and that, to receive our reward in this world, through the transitory riches and honours which we there receive, is almost a certain sign that we are not to receive it in the other. On the contrary, grandeur and prosperity

would become a state worthy of envy, even according to the rules of faith; contrary to the maxim of Jesus Christ, it would be necessary to call those happy who are immersed in pleasures and in opulence; since, besides the comforts of a smiling fortune, they would likewise find there a way of salvation more mild and more easy than in an obscure state; those who suffer, and who weep here below, would then be the most miserable of all men; since, to all the bitterness of their condition, would likewise be added those of a gospel, more rigorous and more austere for them than for persons born in abundance. What new gospel would it then be necessary to announce to you, if such were the rules of the morality of Jesus Christ?

But enough can hardly be said on this point. Granting that prosperity should not exact more rigid precautions in consequence of the dangers which surround it, it would exact, at least, more rigorous reparation, through the crimes and excesses which are inseparable from it. Alas! my brethren, is it not among you that we find passions without bounds; that jealousies are more keen, hatred more lasting, revenge more honourable, evil-speaking more cruel, ambition more boundless, and voluptuousness more shameful? Is it not among the great that the most shocking debauchery even refines upon the common crimes; that dissipation becomes an art; and that, in order to prevent those disgusts inseparable from licentiousness, resources are sought in guilt against guilt itself? What indulgence then can you promise yourselves on the part of religion? If the most righteous be responsible for the whole law, should the

greatest sinners be discharged from it? Measure your duties by your crimes, and not by your rank; judge of yourselves by the insults which you have offered to God, and not by the vain homage which is paid to you by men; number the days and the years of your crimes which shall be the eternal causes of your condemnation, and not the years and the ages of your ancient race, which are only vain titles written upon the ashes of your tombs; examine what you owe to God, and not what men owe to you. If the world were to judge you, you might promise yourselves distinctions and preferences; but the world shall itself be judged; and he, who will judge it and you also, shall distinguish men only by their vices or by their virtues. He will not demand names, he will demand only deeds! Judge therefore the distinctions which you ought to expect.

Moreover, we do not find that Jesus Christ, in the gospel, proposed to the princes of the people, and to the grandees of Jerusalem, other maxims than to the citizens of Judea, and to his disciples, all taken from the lowest ranks of the people; he speaks in the capital of Judea, and before all that Palestine held the most illustrious, as he speaks upon the borders of the sea, or upon the mountains, to the obscure populace which followed him; his maxims are not changed with the rank of those who listen to him. The cross, violence, contempt of the world, self-denial, abstinence from pleasures: these are what he announces at Jerusalem, the seat of kings, as well as at Nazareth, the most obscure place of Judea; to the rich young man, as well as to the children of Zebedee, whose only inheritance was their nets; to the sisters of Lazarus, of a distin-

guished rank in Palestine, as well as to the woman of Samaria, of a more obscure condition; his enemies themselves confessed that this was his peculiar character, and were forced to render him this justice, that he taught the way of God in truth, and that he was no respecter of rank or of persons.

But further. Even after his death the gospel seemed a doctrine sent down from heaven, only in order that by announcing to the great and to the powerful sorrowful and crucifying maxims, apparently so incompatible with their station, they might submit to the yoke of Jesus Christ, and embrace a law which, amid all their prosperity and abundance, permitted them no more pleasures and comforts here below, than to the common and simple people. And, indeed, why should the first defenders of faith have regarded the conversion of Cesars, and of the powerful of the age, as a proof of the truth and of the divinity of the gospel? What would there be so surprising, that the rich and the powerful had embraced a doctrine which would distinguish them from the people by a greater indulgence; which, while it prescribed tears, fasting, self-denial, to others, would relax in favour of the great, and would consent that profusion, pleasures, sensualities, gaming, public places, all so rigorously forbidden to common believers, should become an innocent occupation for them; and that what is a road of perdition for others, should for them alone be a road of salvation? It would then be the wisdom of the age which would have established the gospel, and not the folly of the cross; it would be the artifices and servility of men, and not the arm of the Almighty; it would be flesh and blood, and

not the power of God; and the conversion of the universe would have nothing more wonderful, than the establishment of superstitions and sects.

And candidly, my brethren, if the gospel had distinctions to make, and favours to grant; if the law of God could relax something of its severity, would it be in favour of those who are born to rank and to abundance? What! Would it preserve all its rigour for the poor and the unfortunate? Would it condemn to tears, to fasting, to penitence, to poverty, those unfortunate souls whose days are passed in suffering and sorrow, and whose only comfort is that of eating with temperance the bread earned with the sweat of their brow? And would it discharge from their rigorous duties the grandees of the earth? Would it exact nothing painful of those whose days are only diversified by the variety of their pleasures? And would it reserve all its indulgence for those soft and voluptuous souls, who live only for the senses, who believe that they are upon the earth for the sole purpose of enjoying an iniquitous felicity, and who know no other god than themselves?

Great God! How blind does not thy justice render human prosperities; which, after having corrupted the heart, extinguish likewise all the lights of faith! It rarely happens but that the great, so enlightened with regard to the interests of the earth, the ways to fortune and glory, and the secret springs which give motion to courts and to empires, live in a profound ignorance of the ways of salvation. They have been so much accustomed to favour by the world, that they are persuaded they ought likewise to find it in religion. Because

men do them credit for the smallest steps taken in their behalf, they believe, O my God! that thou regardest them with the same eyes as men; and that, in fulfilling some weak duties of piety, in taking some small steps for thee, they go even beyond what they owe to thee: as if the least of their religious works acquired a new merit from their rank; instead of which, they acquire it, in thy sight, only from that faith and charity which animates them.

It is thus, that the law of God, immutable in its extent, is the same for all stations, for the great and for the people. But it is likewise immutable in all the situations of life; and neither difficult conjunctures, nor perplexities, nor apparent dangers, nor pretexts of public good, can ever become a legitimate cause of its violation, or even mitigation. This was to have been my last reflection; but I abridge it, and proceed.

Yes, my brethren, we can always find that we think reason and necessity against our duties, that is to say, against the law of God; situations the least dangerous, conjunctures the least embarrassing, furnish us with pretexts to violate it with safety, and persuade us that the law of God would be unjust, and would exact too much of men, if, on these occasions, it were not to use indulgence with regard to us.

Thus, the law of God commands us to render to each that which is his due; to retrench, in order to pay debts incurred through our excesses, and not to permit our unfortunate creditors to suffer by our senseless profusion: nevertheless, the general persuasion is, that, in a great place, it is necessary to support the eclat of public dignity; that the honour of the sove-

reign requires that a mean and sorry external should not disgrace the elevated post which he hath confided to us; that we are responsible to the sovereign, to the state, and to ourselves, before being so to individuals; and that public property is then superior to the private right.

Thus, the law of God enjoins us to tear out the eye which giveth offence, and to cast it from us; to separate ourselves from objects, which have always been dangerous to our innocence, and near to which we can never be in safety: nevertheless, the noise which a breach would make, the suspicions which it might awaken in the public mind, the ties of society, of relationship, of friendship, which seem to render the separation impossible without eclat, persuade us, that it is not then commanded, and that a danger, which appears necessary, becomes a security to us.

Thus, the law of God commands us to render glory to the truth; not to betray our conscience by iniquitously retaining it in injustice; that is, not to conceal our true sentiments through human motives, from those to whom our duty obliges us to announce them: nevertheless, we persuade ourselves that truths, which would be unavailing, ought to be suppressed; and that a liberty, the only fruit of which would be the risking our fortune, and rendering ourselves hated, without improving those to whom we owe the truth, would rather be an indiscretion than a law of charity and justice.

Thus, the law of God ordains us to consult in public cares, only the utility of the people, for whom alone the authority is entrusted to us; to consider ourselves

as charged with the interests of the multitude, as the avengers of injustice, and the refuge against oppression and poverty: nevertheless, we believe ourselves to be situated in conjunctures, in which it is necessary to shut our eyes upon iniquity, to support abuses which we know to be untenable, to sacrfice conscience and duty to the necessity of the times, and, without scruple, to violate the clearest rules, because the inconveniencies, which would arise from their observance, seem to render their transgression necessary. Lastly, Human pretexts, interests, and inconveniencies, always make the balance turn to that side; and duty, and the law of God, always yield to conjunctures and to the necessity of the times.

Now, my brethren, I might tell you, in the first place, that the interests of salvation are the greatest of all interests; that fortune, life, reputation, the whole world itself, put in comparison with your soul, ought to be reckoned as nothing; and that, though heaven and earth should change, the whole world perish, and every evil burst upon our heads, these inconveniencies would always be infinitely less than the transgression of the law of God.

Secondly, I might tell you that the law hath always, at least, security in its favour against these pretexts, because the obligation of the law is clear and precise; instead of which, the pretext, which causes the exception, is always doubtful; and consequently, to prefer the pretext to the law, is to leave a safe way, and to make choice of another, for which no person can be answerable to you.

Lastly, I might tell you that, the gospel having only

been given to us in order to detach us from the world and from ourselves, and to make us dead to all our terrestrial affections, we deceive ourselves when we consider, as inconveniencies, certain consequences of that divine law, fatal either to our fortune, to our glory, or to our ease, and when we persuade ourselves that it is then permitted to us to have recourse to expedients which soften it, and reconcile its severity with the interests of our self-love. Jesus Christ hath never meant to prescribe to us easy and convenient duties, which take nothing from the passions; he came to bring the sword of separation to our hearts, to divide man from his relations, from his friends, and from himself; to hold out to us a way rugged and difficult to keep. Thus, what we call inconveniencies and unheard-of extremities, are, in reality, only the spirit of the law, the natural consequences of the divine rules, and the end that Jesus Christ hath intended in prescribing them to us.

The young man mentioned in the gospel regarded as an inconvenience, the being unable to pay the last duties to his father, and to gather in what he had succeeded to, if he followed Jesus Christ; and it was precisely that sacrifice which Jesus Christ exacted of him. Those who were invited to the feast regarded it as an inconvenience, one to forsake his country-house, another his trade, and the last to delay his marriage; and it was in order to break asunder all these ties, which bound them still too much to the earth, that the father of the family invited them to come and seat themselves at the feast. Esther, at first, considered it as an inconvenience to appear before Ahasuerus, contrary to

the law of the empire, and to declare herself a daughter of Abraham, and protectress of the children of Israel; and, nevertheless, as the wise Mordecai represented to her, the Lord had raised her to that point of glory and prosperity only for that important occasion. Whatever is a constraint to us, appears a reason against the law; and we regard as inconveniencies the obligations themselves.

Besides, my brethren, Is it not certain that the principal merit of our duties is derived from the obstacles which never fail to oppose their practice; that the most essential character of the law of Jesus Christ is that of exciting against it all the reasons of flesh and blood; and that virtue would resemble vice, if outwardly and inwardly it found in us only facilities and conveniencies? The righteous, my brethren, have never been peaceable observers of the holy rules: Abel found inconveniencies in the jealousy of his own brother; Noah in the unbelief of his own citizens; Abraham in the disputes of his servants; Joseph in the dangers to which he was exposed through his love of modesty, and the rage of a faithless woman; Daniel in the customs of a profane court; the pious Esdras in the manners of his age; and the noble Eleazar in the snares of a deceiving constitution: lastly, follow the history of the just, and you will see that, in all ages, those who have walked in the precepts and in the ordinances of the law, have experienced inconveniencies, in which righteousness itself seemed to authorise the transgression of the rules; have encountered obstacles in their way, where the lights of human reason seemed to decide in favour of the pretext against the law; in a

word, where virtue seemed to condemn virtue itself: and that, consequently, it is not new for the law of God to meet with obstacles; but that it is new to pretend to find in these obstacles legitimate excuses for absolving ourselves from the law of God.

The most decisive argument which confirms this truth is, that our passions alone form the inconveniencies which authorise us in seeking alleviations of our duties and of the law of God; and that views of fortune, of glory, or of favour, engage us in certain proceedings, justify them in our eyes, in spite of the evident precepts which condemn them, only because we love our glory and our fortune more than the precepts themselves.

Let us then be dead to the world and to ourselves, my brethren; let us restore to our heart the sentiments of love and of preference which it owes to its Lord: every thing will then appear possible; difficulties will be done away in an instant, and what we call inconveniencies will either be no longer reckoned as any thing, or we shall consider them as inseparable proofs of virtue, and not as the excuses of vice. How easy is it to find pretexts when we love them! Arguments are never wanting to the passions. Self-love is always ready in placing, at least, appearances on its side; it always changes our failings into duties, and our inclinations soon become legitimate claims; and what is most deplorable in this, says St. Augustin, is that we call in even religion itself in aid of our passions; that we draw motives from piety, in order to violate piety itself; and that we have recourse to holy pretexts to authorise iniquitous desires.

It is thus, O my God! that almost our whole life is passed in seducing ourselves; that we employ the lights of our reason only in darkening those of faith; that we consume the few days we have to pass upon the earth only in seeking authorities for our passions, in imagining situations in which we believe ourselves to be enabled to disobey thee with impunity; that is to say, that all our cares, all our reflections, all the superiority of our views, of our lights, of our talents, all the wisdom of our measures and of our counsels, are limited to the accomplishment of our ruin, and to conceal from ourselves our eternal destruction.

Let us shun this evil, my brethren; let us reckon no way safe for us but that of the rules and law of God; and let us remember that there shall be more sinners condemned through the pretexts which seem to authorise the transgressions of the law, than through the avowed crimes which violate it. Thus, after having been the rule of our conduct upon earth, shall the law of God be our eternal consolation in heaven.

Amen.

SERMON XXVI.

FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

LUKE ii. 10, 11.

For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

THESE are indeed, my brethren, the great tidings which, for four thousand years, the world had expected; this is the great event which so many prophets had foretold, so many ceremonies had figured, so many righteous had awaited, and which all nature seemed to promise, and to hasten by the universal corruption spread through all flesh; this is the great blessing which God's goodness prepared for men, after the infidelity of their first parent had rendered them all subject to sin and death.

The Saviour, the Christ, the Lord, appears at last upon the earth. The over-shadowed brings forth the righteous; the star of Jacob appears to the universe; the sceptre is departed from Judah, and he, who was to come, is arrived; the age of darkness is accom-

plished; the promised sign of the Lord to Judea hath appeared; a virgin has conceived, and brought forth; and out of Bethlehem comes the leader who is to enlighten and govern all Israel.

What new blessings, my brethren, does not this birth announce to men? It would not, during so many ages, have been announced, awaited, and desired; it would not have formed the religion of a whole people, the object of all the prophecies, the unravelling of all the types, the sole end of all the proceedings of God towards men, had it not been the greatest mark of his love which he could give them. What a blessed night is that which presides at this divine bringing-forth! It hath seen the light of the world shine forth in its darkness, and the heavens resound with joy and songs of thanksgiving.

But, my brethren, we must participate in the blessings which this birth is meant to bring us, in order to enter into all the transports of delight which it spreads through the heavens and the earth. The common joy is founded only on the common salvation which is offered to us; and if, in spite of this aid, we still obstinately persist in perishing, the church weeps over us, and we mingle mourning and sorrow with that joy with which such blessed tidings inspire it.

Now, what are the inestimable blessings which this birth brings to men? The heavenly spirits themselves appear to make it known to the shepherds; it comes to render glory to God, and peace to men; and thus is the whole foundation of this great mystery laid open. It renders to God, that glory of which men had wished to deprive him; to men, that peace of which they had constantly struggled to deprive themselves.

PART I. Man had been placed upon the earth for the sole purpose of rendering, to the author of his being, that glory and that homage which were his due. Every thing called him to these duties; and every thing, which ought to have called, removed him from them. To his supreme Majesty, he owed adoration and homage; to his paternal goodness, love; to his infinite wisdom, the sacrifice of his reason and of his understanding. These duties, engraven on his heart, and born with him, were also incessantly proclaimed to him by all creatures; he could neither listen to himself, nor to any thing around him, without finding them; he forgets, nevertheless, and effaces them from his heart. He no longer saw in the work, that honour and worship which were due to the sovereign Architect; in the blessings with which he loaded him, he saw no more that love which he owed to his benefactor; in the obscurity spread even over natural causes, that impossibility, of fathoming the secrets of God, and that mistrust, in which he ought to live, of his own reason. Idolatry, therefore, rendered to the creature that worship which the Creator had reserved for himself alone: the synagogue honoured him with the worship of the lips alone, and that love, which it owed him, was confined to external homage totally unworthy of him: philosophy lost itself in its own ideas, measured the lights of God by those of men, and vainly believed that reason, which knew not itself, was able to know all truth. Thus were three plagues spread over the face of the whole earth. In a word, God was no longer either known or glorified, and man was no longer known to himself.

And, in the first place, To what excesses had idolatry not carried its profane worship? The death of a

beloved being, quickly exalted him to a divinity, and his vile ashes, on which his nothingness was stamped in characters so indelible, became themselves the title of his glory and of his immortality. Conjugal love made gods to itself; impure love followed the example, and determined to have its altars: the wife and the mistress, the husband and the lover, had temples, priests, and sacrifices. Folly, or the general corruption, adopted a worship so ridiculous and abominable; the whole universe was infected with it; the majesty of the laws of the empire authorised it; and the magnificence of the temples, the pomp of the sacrifices, the immense riches of the images, rendered that folly respectable. Every people was desirous of having their own god; in default of man they offered incense to the beast; impure homages became the worship of these impure divinities; cities, mountains, the fields, and the deserts, were stained with them, and became the seats of superb edifices consecrated to pride, to lasciviousness or to revenge. The number of the divinities equalled that of the passions; the gods were almost as numerous as men; every thing became a god for man; and the true God was the only one unknown to him.

The world was plunged, almost from its creation, in the horror of this darkness, and every age added to it fresh impieties. In proportion as the appointed time of the Deliverer drew near, the depravity of men seemed to increase. Rome itself, the mistress of the universe, gave way to all the different worships of the nations she had subjugated; and beheld, exalted within her walls, the various idols of so many conquered countries, that they became the public monu-

ments of her folly and blindness, rather than of her victories.

But, after all, though the flesh had corrupted his path, God no longer wished to pour out his wrath upon men, nor to exterminate them by a fresh deluge. He wished to save them. He had placed in the heavens the sign of his covenant with the world; and that sign was not the palpable and shining rainbow which appears in the clouds; it was Jesus Christ his only Son, the Word made flesh, the true seal of the eternal covenant, and the only light by which the whole world is illuminated.

He appears on the earth, and restores to his Father that glory of which the impiety of a public worship had wished to deprive him. The homage rendered to him by his holy soul united to the Word, at once makes amends to his supreme Majesty for all the honours which the universe had hitherto denied him, in order to prostitute them to a created being. A worshipper, partly man and partly God, renders more glory to the divinity than all the idolatrous ages and nations had deprived him of; and such homage must indeed have been agreeable to the sovereign God, seeing it alone effaced idolatry from the earth, made the blood of impure victims cease to flow, overturned the profane altars, silenced the oracles of demons, reduced to dust the vain idols, and changed their superb temples, till then the receptacle of every abomination, into houses of adoration and prayer. Thus was the universe changed: the only God, unknown even in Athens, and in those cities most celebrated for knowledge and polished manners, was worshipped: the world acknowledged its Author: God entered into his rights; a worship worthy of him

was established over the whole earth; and he had every where adorers, who worshipped him in spirit and in truth.

Behold the first blessing accruing from the birth of Jesus Christ, and the first glory which he renders to his Father. But, my brethren, is this great blessing for us? We no longer worship vain idols; an incestuous Jupiter, a lascivious Venus, or a cruel and revengeful Mars; but is God, therefore, more glorified among us? In their places do we not substitute fortune, voluptuousness, court favour, the world, with all its pleasures? For, whatever we love more than God, that we worship; whatever we prefer to God, that becomes our God; whatever becomes the sole object of our thoughts, of our desires, of our affections, of our fears and of our hopes, becomes likewise the object of our worship; and our gods are our passions, to which we sacrifice the true God.

Now, how many idols of this kind still, alas! remain in the Christian world! You make your idol of that unfortunate being, to whom you have prostituted your heart; to whom you sacrifice your wealth, your fortune, your glory, and your peace; and from whom neither religious motives, nor even those of the world, can detach you; and what less is she than your divinity, since, in your madness, you do not refuse her even the name? You, that court and that fortune which engrosses you, to which you devote all your cares, all your exertions, all your movements, in short, your whole soul, mind, will, and life, that is your idol; and what criminal homage do you refuse from the moment that it is exacted of you, and that it may become the price of its favour? You, that shameful intemperance, which debases your name and birth; which no longer accords even with the manners of the age;

which has drowned and besotted all your talents in the excesses of wine and debauchery; which, by rendering you callous to every thing else, leaves you neither relish nor feeling but for the brutal pleasures of the table, that is your idol: you think that you live only in those moments given to it; and your heart renders more homage to that infamous and abject god than your despicable and profane songs. The passions formerly made the gods; and Jesus Christ hath destroyed these idols only by destroying the passions which had raised them up: you exalt them again, by reviving all the passions which had rendered the whole world idolatrous. What matters it to recognize one God, if you elsewhere bestow your homage? Worship is in the heart; and if the true God be not the God of your heart, you place, like the pagans, vile creatures in his place, and you render not to him that glory which is his due.

Thus, Jesus Christ doth not confine himself to manifesting the name of his Father to men, and to the establishment of the knowledge of the true God, on the ruins of idols. He raiseth up worshippers, who reckon external homage as nothing, unless animated and sanctified by love, and who shall consider mercy, justice, and holiness, as the offerings most worthy of God, and the most shining attendants of their worship. This is the second blessing derived from the birth of Jesus Christ, and the second kind of glory which he renders to his Father.

In effect, God was known, says the prophet, in Judea; Jerusalem beheld no idols in the public places, usurping the homage due to the God of Abraham; "there was neither iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness "in Israel:" and that portion of the earth alone was

free from the general contagion. But the magnificence of its temple, the pomp of its sacrifices, the splendour of its solemnities, the exactitude of its lawful observances, constituted the whole merit of its worship. All religion was confined to these external duties. Its morals were not less criminal: Injustice, fraud, falsehood, adultery, every vice subsisted, and was even countenanced by these vain appearances of worship: God was honoured from the lips; but the heart of that ungrateful people was ever distant from him.

Jesus Christ comes to open the eyes of Judea on an error of so long standing, so gross, and so injurious to his Father. He comes to inform them, that man may be satisfied with externals alone, but that God regards only the heart; that every outward homage which withholds it from him, is an insult and an act of hypocrisy, rather than of true worship; that it matters little to purify the external, if the internal be full of infection and corruption; and that God is truly worshipped only by loving him.

But, alas! my brethren, is not this gross mistake, with which the synagogue was so often reproached by Jesus Christ, still the error of the majority of us? To what, in fact, is the whole of our worship reduced? To some external ceremonies; to fulfilling certain public duties prescribed by the law; and even this is the religion only of the most respectable. They assist in the holy mysteries; they do not, without scruple, depart from the laws of the church; they repeat the prayers which custom has consecrated; they go through the solemnities, and increase the crowd which runs to our temples: this is all. But are they, in consequence, more detached from the world, and from its criminal pleasures? Less occupied with the cares of dress, or

of fortune? More inclined to break off a criminal engagement, or to avoid opportunities which have so often been fatal to their innocence? Do they bring to these external practices of religion, a pure heart, a lively faith, a charity without guile? All their passions subsist amid these religious works, which are given to custom rather than to religion.

And remark, I pray you, my brethren, that they would not dare to absolve themselves altogether from these duties; to live, like the impious, without any profession of worship, and without fulfilling at least some of its public duties: They would consider themselves as anathematised, and worthy of the thunder of heaven. And yet they dare to sully these holy duties by the most criminal manners, they regard themselves without horror, while rendering these superficial remains of religion useless, by a life which religion condemns and abhors, and they dread not the wrath of God, in continuing crimes which attract it on our heads, and in limiting all that is his due to vain homages which insult him!

Nevertheless, as I have already said, of all the worldly these are the most prudent, and, in the eyes of the world, the most regular. They have not yet thrown off the yoke, like so many others; they do not arrogate to themselves the shocking glory of disbelieving in God; they blaspheme not what they do not know; they do not consider religion as a mockery and a human invention; they still wish to hold to it by some externals; but they hold not to it by the heart; they dishonour it by their irregularities; and they are Christians only in name. Thus, even in a greater degree than formerly under the synagogue, do the magnificent externals of religion subsist among us, along with a more

profound and more general depravity of manners than ever the prophets made a subject of reproach to the obstinacy and hypocrisy of the Jews: thus, that religion, in which we glory, is become, to the greatest number of believers, but a superficial worship: thus, that new covenant, which ought to be written only in the heart, that law of spirit and life, which ought to render men wholly spiritual, that inward worship, which ought to have given to God worshippers in spirit and in truth, has given him only phantoms, fictitious adorers, and the mere appearances of worship; in a word, we are still but as a Jewish people, who honour him from the lips, but whose corrupted heart, stained with a thousand crimes, and chained by a thousand iniquitous passions, is always far distant from him.

Here then is the second blessing, of the birth of Jesus Christ, in which we have no part. He came to abolish a worship wholly external, which was confined to sacrifices of animals and lawful ceremonies, and which, in not rendering to God the homage of our love, alone capable of glorifying him, rendered not to him that glory which is his due: in place of these appearances of religion, he came to substitute a law which ought to be fulfilled wholly in the heart; a worship, of which the love of his Father ought to be the first and principal homage. Nevertheless, this holy worship, this new precept, this sacred trust, which he hath confided to us, has miserably degenerated in our hands; we have turned it into a worship wholly Pharisaical, in which the heart has no share; which has no influence in changing our irregular propensities; which has no effect upon our manners, and which only renders us so much the more criminal, as we abuse the blessing which ought to wash out and purify all our crimes.

Lastly, Men had likewise wished to steal from God the glory of his providence and of his eternal wisdom. Philosophers, struck with the absurdity of a worship which multiplied gods to infinity, and forced, by the lights of reason alone, to acknowledge one sole Supreme Being, disfigured the nature of that Being by a thousand absurd opinions. Some figured to themselves an indolent god; retired within himself; in full possession of his own happiness; disdaining to abase himself by paying attention to what passes on the earth; reckoning as nothing men whom he had created; equally insensible to their virtues as to their vices; and leaving wholly to chance the course of ages and seasons, the revolutions of empires, the lot of each individual, the whole machine of this vast universe, and the whole dispensation of human things. Others subjected him to a fatal chain of events; they made him a god without liberty and without power; and, while they regarded him as the master of men, they believed him to be the slave of destiny. The errors of reason were then the only rule of religion, and of the belief of those who were considered as the wisest and most enlightened.

Jesus Christ came to restore to his Father that glory of which the vain reasonings of philosophy had deprived him. He came to teach men that faith is the source of true lights; and that the sacrifice of reason is the first step of Christian philosophy. He came to fix uncertainty, by instructing us in what we ought to know of the Supreme Being, and what, with regard to him, we ought not to know.

It was not, indeed, sufficient that men, in order to render glory to God, should make a sacrifice to him of their life, as to the author of their being, and should, by that avowal, acknowledge the impiety of idolatry;

that they should make a sacrifice to him of their love and of their heart, as to their sovereign felicity, and thereby proclaim the insufficiency and the inutility of the external and Pharisaical worship of the synagogue; it was likewise required, that to him they should sacrifice their reason, as to the source of wisdom and eternal truth, and thus be undeceived with regard to the vain researches and the conceited knowledge of philosophers.

Now, the birth alone of a Man-God, the wonderful union of our nature with a divine person, disconcerts all human reason; and this incomprehensible mystery held out to men as their whole knowledge, their whole truth, their whole philosophy, and their whole religion, makes them at once feel, that the truth, which they had hitherto in vain sought, must be sought, not by vain efforts, but by the sacrifice of reason and of our feeble lights.

But, alas! where among us are believers who make a thorough sacrifice of their reason to faith; and who, rejecting their own lights, humble their eyes, in a respectful and silent adoration, before the sublime obscurities of religion? I speak not of those impious beings, still to be found among us, who deny the existence of a God. We must leave them to the horror and the indignation of the whole universe which recognizes a divinity, and worships him; or rather leave them to the horror of their own conscience, which inwardly invokes and calls upon him in spite of themselves, while outwardly they are glorifying themselves in professing not to know him.

I speak of the majority of believers, who have an idea of the divinity, almost equally false and equally human, as had formerly the pagan philosophers; who

consider him as nothing in all the accidents of life; who live as if chance or the caprice of men determined all things here below; and who acknowledge good-luck and bad-luck as the two sole divinities which govern the world, and preside over every thing relative to the earth. I speak of those men of little faith, who, far from adoring the secrets of futurity in the profound and impenetrable councils of Providence, search for them in ridiculous and childish prophecies; attribute to man a knowledge which God hath reserved only to himself; await with a childish belief, from the dreams of a false prophet, events and revolutions which are to decide the destiny of nations and empires; found thereupon vain hopes for themselves, and renew either the folly of pagan augurs and soothsayers, or the impiety of the pythoness of Saul, and of the oracles of Delphi and Dodona. I speak of those who wish to penetrate into the eternal designs of God upon our destinies; and who, being unable, by the unassisted powers of reason, to solve the insurmountable difficulties of the mysteries of grace with regard to the salvation of men, far from crying out with the apostle, "O the depth of "the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of "God!" are tempted to believe, either that God doth not interfere in our salvation; or if he do, that it is needless for us to interfere in it ourselves. I speak of those dissolute characters, who always consider as plausible and convincing, whatever unbelief opposes to faith, though it be, in fact, weak and foolish in the extreme; who are staggered by the most frivolous doubt proposed by the impious; who appear as if they would be delighted that religion were false; and who are less touched with that respectable load of proofs which overpower reason and its truth, than with a senseless

discourse which opposes it, and in which there is generally nothing important but the boldness of the impiety and of the blasphemy. Lastly, I speak of many believers who leave to the vulgar the belief of the wonderful actions which the history of religion has preserved to us; who seem to believe that, whatever is above the power of man, is likewise beyond the power of God; and who refuse credit to the miracles of a religion which is founded solely on them, and which is itself the greatest of all miracles.

Thus do we still withhold from God that glory which the birth of Jesus Christ had rendered to him. It had taught us to sacrifice our own reason to the incomprehensible mystery of his manifestation in our flesh, and no longer to live but by faith; it had fixed the uncertainties of the human mind, and recalled it from the errors and the abyss in which reason had plunged it, to the way of truth and life: we nevertheless abandon it, and even under the empire of faith, we wish still to walk as formerly, under the standards, if I may venture so to speak, of a weak reason: the mysteries of religion, which we cannot comprehend, shock us; we suspect every thing; we wish to reform every thing; and we would have God to think like man. Without altogether losing our faith, we suffer it to be inwardly weakened; we allow it to remain inactive: and it is this relaxation of faith which has corrupted our manners, multiplied vices, inflamed all hearts with a love of things present, extinguished the love of riches to come, placed trouble, hatred, and dissention among believers, and effaced those original marks of innocence, of sanctity, and of charity, which at first had rendered Christianity so respectable even to those who refused submission to it. But not only

doth the birth of Jesus Christ restore to God that glory of which men had wished to deprive him, but it likewise restores to men that peace, of which they had never ceased to deprive themselves: "And on earth "peace and good will towards men."

PART II. An universal peace reigned throughout the universe when Jesus Christ, the "Prince of "Peace," appeared on the earth: all the nations subject to the Roman empire peaceably supported the yoke of those haughty masters of the world: Rome herself, after civil dissentions, which had almost depopulated the city, filled the islands and deserts with her proscribed, and bathed Europe and Asia with the blood of her murdered citizens, breathed from the horror of these troubles, and being again united under the authority of a Cesar, experienced, in slavery, a peace which she had never, during the enjoyment of her liberty, been able to accomplish.

The universe was then at rest; but it was only a deceitful calm. Man, the prey of his own violent and iniquitous passions, experienced within himself the most cruel dissention and warfare: far from God; delivered up to the agitations and frenzies of his own heart; combated by the multiplicity and the eternal contrariety of his irregular propensities, he was unable to find peace, because he never sought it but in the source of all his troubles and disquiets. Philosophers made a boast of being able to bestow it on their followers; but that universal calm of the passions which they promised to the wise, and which they so emphatically announced, might suppress their sallies, but it left the whole venom in the heart. It was a peace of pride and ostentation; it masked the outward

man, but, under that mask of ceremony, man always knew himself to be the same.

Jesus Christ came this day upon the earth, to bring that true peace to men which the world had never hitherto been able to give them. He came to apply the remedy to the source of the disease; his divine philosophy is not confined to the promulgation of pompous precepts, which might be agreeable to reason, but which cured not the wounds of the heart; and, as pride, voluptuousness, hatred, and revenge, had been the fatal sources of all the agitations experienced by the heart of man, he came to restore peace to him, by expelling them through his grace, his doctrine, and his example.

Yes, my brethren, I say that pride had been the original source of all the troubles which tore the heart of men. What wars, what frenzies, had that fatal passion not lighted up on the earth? With what torrents of blood had it not inundated the universe? And what is the history of nations and of empires, of princes and of conquerors, of every age and people, but the history of those calamities with which pride from the beginning had afflicted men? The entire world was but a gloomy theatre, upon which that mad and haughty passion every day exhibited the most bloody scenes. But the external operations were only a faint image of the troubles which the proud man inwardly experienced. Ambition was a virtue: moderation was looked upon as meanness: an individual overthrew his country, overturned laws and customs, rendered millions miserable, in order to usurp the first place among his fellow-citizens; and the success of his guilt ensured him every homage; his name, stained with the blood of his brethren, acquired only additional

lustre in the public annals which preserved its memory; and a prosperous villain became the greatest character of his age. Descending among the crowd, ambition became less striking; but it was neither less animated nor furious: the obscure individual was not more at his ease than the public character: each wished to carry off the prize from his equals: the orator, and the philosopher, disputed and tore from each other that glory, which, in fact, was the sole end of all their toils and watchings; and, as the desires of pride are insatiable, man, to whom it was then considered honourable to yield himself up to it, being unable to rest in any degree of elevation, was likewise incapable of peace and tranquillity. Pride, become the sole source of human honour and glory, was likewise become the fatal rock of the quiet and happiness of men.

The birth of Jesus Christ, by correcting the world of this error, re-established on the earth that peace which pride had banished from it. He might have manifested himself to men, with all the marks of splendour which the prophets attributed to him: He might have assumed the pompous titles of conqueror of Judah, legislator of the people, and deliverer of Israel; Jerusalem, in these glorious marks, would have recognised him whom she awaited: but Jerusalem, in these titles, saw only a human glory; and Jesus Christ came to undeceive, and to teach her, that such glory is nothing; that such an expectation had been unworthy of the oracles of so many prophets who had announced him; that the Holy Spirit, which inspired them, could hold out only holiness and eternal riches to men; that all other riches, far from rendering them happy, only increased their evils and crimes; and that his visible

ministry was to correspond with the splendid promises, which had, for so many ages, announced him, only by his being wholly spiritual, and being born only for the salvation of men.

Thus, was he born at Bethlehem, in a poor and abject state, without external show or splendour, whose birth the songs of all the armies of heaven then celebrated; thus did he who was exalted above all principality or power, appear without a title to distinguish him in the eyes of men; thus did he suffer his name to be written down among those of the obscurest subjects of Cesar, he whose name was above all other names, and who alone had the right of writing down the names of his chosen in the book of eternity: vulgar and simple shepherds alone came to pay him homage, before whom whatever is mighty on the earth, in heaven, and in hell, ought to bend the knee: lastly, whatever can confound human pride is assembled at the spectacle of his birth. If titles, rank, or prosperity, had been able to render us happy here below, and to shed peace through our heart, Jesus Christ would have made his appearance clothed in them, and would have brought all these riches to his disciples; but he brought peace to us only by holding them in contempt, and by teaching us to hold them equally in contempt: he came to render us happy, only by suppressing desires which had hitherto occasioned all our disquiets: he came to point out to us more solid and more durable riches, alone capable of calming our hearts, of filling our desires, and of dissipating our troubles: riches of which man cannot deprive us, and which require us only to love and to wish for them to be assured of possessing them.

And yet who is there that tastes of this blessed peace?

Wars, troubles, frenzies, are they more rare since his birth? Are those empires and states which worship him, become in consequence more peaceful? Does that pride which he came to destroy occasion less commotion and confusion among men? Alas! Seek among Christians that peace which ought to be their inheritance, and where shall you find it?—In cities? Pride sets every thing there in motion; every one wishes to soar above the rank of his ancestors: an individual, exalted by fortune, destroys the happiness of thousands who walk in his footsteps, without being able to attain the same point of prosperity. Is it in the circle of domestic walls? Alas! they conceal only distresses and cares: and the father of the family, occupied only with the advancement, rather than the Christian education of his offspring, leaves to them, for inheritance, his agitations and disquiets, which they, in their turn, shall one day transmit to their descendants. Do we find it in the palaces of kings? But, there it is that a lawless and boundless ambition gnaws, and devours every heart; it is there that, under the specious mask of joy and tranquillity, the most violent and the bitterest passions are nourished; it is there that happiness apparently resides, and yet where pride occasions the greatest number of discontented and miserable. Does it dwell in the sanctuary? Alas! there ought surely to be found an asylum of peace; but ambition pervades even the holy place; the efforts made there are more to raise themselves above their brethren, than to render themselves useful to them; the holy dignities of the church become, like those of the age, the reward of intrigue and caballing; the religious circumspection of the prince cannot put a stop to solicitations and private intrigues; we see there the same inveteracy in

rivalships, the same sorrow in consequence of neglect, the same jealousy towards those who are preferred to us; a ministry is boldly canvassed for, which ought to be accepted only with fear and trembling: they seat themselves in the temple of God, though placed there by other hands than his: they head the flock without his consent to whom it belongs, and without his having said, as to Peter, "Feed my sheep;" and, as they have taken the charge without call and without ability, the flock are led without edification and without fruit, and often, alas! with shame.—O peace of Jesus Christ! which passest all understanding, sole remedy against the troubles which pride incessantly excites in our hearts, who then shall be able to give thee to man?

But, secondly, If the troubles arising from pride had banished peace from the earth, the impure desires of the flesh had not given rise to fewer cares. Man, forgetting the excellency of his nature, and the sanctity of his origin, gave himself up, like the beasts, without scruple, to the impetuosity of a brutal instinct. Finding it the most violent and the most universal of his propensities, he believed it to be also the most innocent and the most lawful. In order still more to authorise it, he made it part of his worship, and formed to himself impure gods, in whose temples that infamous vice became the only homage which did honour to their altars: even a philosopher, in other respects the wisest of pagans, dreading lest marriage should put a kind of check on that deplorable passion, had wished to abolish that sacred bond, to permit among men, as among animals, a brutal confusion, and only to multiply the human race through their crimes. The more vice became general, the more it lost the name

of vice; and, yet what a deluge of miseries had it not poured out upon the earth? With what fury did it not arm people against people; kings against kings; blood against blood; brethren against brethren; carrying every where trouble and carnage, and shaking the whole universe? Ruins of cities, wrecks of the most flourishing empires, sceptres and crowns overthrown, became the public and gloomy monuments which every age reared up, in order, it would seem, to preserve, to following ages, the remembrance and the fatal tradition of those calamities with which that vice had afflicted the human race. It became of itself an inexhaustible source of trouble and anxiety to the man who gave himself up to a boundless gratification of it; it held out peace and pleasure; but jealousy, excess, frenzy, disgust, inconstancy, and chagrin, continually walked in its steps: the laws, religion, and the common example authorising it at that period, it was only the love of ease, in those ages of darkness and corruption, that kept free from it a small number of sages.

But that motive was too feeble to check its impetuous course, and to extinguish its fires in the heart of men: a more powerful remedy was required; and that is, the birth of the Deliverer, who came to draw men out of that abyss of corruption, in order to render them pure and without stain; to break asunder those shameful bonds, and to give peace to their hearts, by restoring to them that freedom and innocence, of which the slavery and tyranny of vice had deprived them. He is born of a virgin-mother, the purest of all created beings: he thereby gives estimation and honour to a virtue unknown to the world, and which even his people considered as a reproach. Besides, in uniting

himself with us, he becomes our head; incorporates us with himself; makes us become members of his mystical body; of that body which no longer receives life and influence but from him; of that body, all whose ministries are holy, and who are to be seated at the right hand of the living God, and to glorify him for ever.

Behold, my brethren, to what an height of honour Jesus Christ, in this mystery, exalts our flesh; he makes of it the temple of God; the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit; the portion of a body in which the fulness of the divinity resides; the object of the kindness and the love of his Father. But do we not still profane this holy temple? Do we not still turn to shame the members of Jesus Christ? Do we, in a higher degree, respect our flesh, since it is become a holy portion of his mystical body? Does not that shameful passion still exercise the same tyranny over Christians, that is to say, over the children of sanctity and liberty? Does it not still disturb the peace of the universe, the tranquillity of empires, the harmony of families, the order of society, the confidence of marriage, the innocence of social intercourse, the lot of every individual? Are not the most tragical spectacles still furnished to the world by it? Does it respect the most sacred ties and the most respectable character? Does it not reckon every duty as nothing? Does it pay attention even to decency? And does it not turn all society into a frightful confusion, where custom has effaced every rule? Even you, who listen to me, from whence have arisen all the miseries and unhappiness of your life; is it not from that deplorable passion? Is it not that which has overturned your fortune, cast trouble and dissention through the heart

of your family, swallowed up the patrimony of your fathers, dishonoured your name, ruined your health, and now makes you drag along the earth a gloomy and disgraceful life? Is it not, at least, that which actually tears your heart, while under its dominion? What passes within you but a tumultuous revolution of fears, desires, jealousies, suspicions, disgusts, and frenzies? And since that passion has stained your soul, have you enjoyed a single moment of peace? Let Jesus Christ again be born within your heart; he alone can be your true peace: chase from it the impure spirits, and the mansion of your soul will be at rest: become once more a child of grace, for innocence is the only source of tranquillity.

Lastly, The birth of Jesus Christ reconciles men to his Father; it reunites the Gentile and the Jew; it destroys all those hateful distinctions of Greek and Barbarian, of Roman and Scythian; it extinguishes all animosities and hatreds; it makes of all nations only one people; of all his disciples, only one heart and one soul: the last kind of peace which it brings to men. Formerly they were united together, neither by worship, nor by a common hope, nor by the new covenant, which, in an enemy, holds out to us a friend. They considered each other almost as creatures of a different species; the diversity of religions, of manners, of countries, of languages, and of interests, had, as it were, diversified in them the same nature: scarcely did they recognize each other by that figure of humanity, which was the only sign of connexion still remaining to them. Like wild beasts, they mutually exterminated each other; they placed their chief glory in depopulating the lands of their fellow-creatures, and in carrying in triumph their bloody heads as the splen-

did memorials of their victories: it might have been said that they held their existence from different irreconcilable creators, always watchful to destroy each other, and who had placed them here below only to revenge their quarrel, and to terminate their disagreement by the general extinction of one of the two parties; every thing disunited men, and nothing bound them together but interest and the passions, which were themselves the only source of their divisions and animosities.

But Jesus Christ is become our peace, and our reconciliation, the corner-stone which binds and unites the whole fabric, the living head which unites all its members, and makes but one body of the whole. Every thing knits us to him; and whatever knits us to him unites us to each other. It is the same Spirit which animates us, the same hope which sustains us, the same bosom which brings us forth, the same fold which assembles us, and the same Shepherd who conducts us; we are children of the same Father, inheritors of the same promises, citizens of the same eternal city, and members of the same body.

Now, my brethren, have so many sacred ties been successful in binding us together? Christianity, which ought to be but the union of hearts, the tie to knit believers to each other, and Jesus Christ to believers; and which ought to represent upon the earth an image of the peace of heaven; Christianity itself is alas! no longer but a horrible theatre of troubles and dissentions: war and fury seem to have established an eternal abode among Christians, and religion itself, which ought to unite, divides them. The unbeliever, the enemy of Jesus Christ, the children of the false prophet, who came to spread war and devastation through

men, are at peace; and the children of peace, the disciples of him who, this day, comes to bring it to men, have their hands continually armed with fire and sword against each other! Kings rise up against kings; nations against nations; seas which separate, reunite them for their mutual destruction: a morsel of stone is sufficient to arm their fury and revenge, and whole nations perish and bury themselves under its walls, in contesting to whom its ruins shall belong: the earth is not sufficiently vast to contain them, and to fix each one within the limits which nature herself seems to have pointed out for states and empires: each wishes to usurp from his neighbour; and a miserable field of battle, which is scarcely sufficient to serve as a burial place to those who have disputed it, becomes the price of those rivers of blood with which it is for ever stained.—O divine Reconciliator of men! return then once more upon the earth, since the peace which thou didst bring to it at thy birth still leaves so many wars and so many calamities in the universe!

Nor is this all: that circle itself, which unites us under the same laws, unites not our hearts and affections; hatreds and jealousies divide citizens equally as they divide nations; animosities are perpetuated in families, and fathers transmit them to their children, as an accursed inheritance. In vain may the authority of the prince disarm the hand, it disarms not the heart; in vain may the sword be wrested from them, with the sword of the tongue they continue a thousand times more cruelly to pierce their enemy; hatred, under the necessity of confining itself within, becomes deeper and more rancorous, and to forgive is looked upon as a dishonourable weakness. Oh! my brethren, in vain then hath Jesus Christ descended upon the earth! He

is come to bring peace to us; he hath left it to us as his inheritance; nothing hath he so strongly recommended to us as loving each other; yet fellowship and peace seem as if banished from among us, and hatred and animosity divide court, city, and private families; and those whom the tenure of offices, the interests of the state, decency itself, and blood, ought, at least, to unite; tear, defame, and wish to destroy, and to exalt themselves on the ruins of each other: religion, which shews us our brethren even in our enemies, is no longer listened to; that awful threatening, which gives us room to expect the same severity on the part of God which we shall have shewn to our brethren, no longer touches or affects us; and all these motives, so capable of softening the heart, still leave it filled with all the bitterness of hatred. We tranquilly live in this frightful state: the justice of our complaints with regard to our enemies, calms us as to the injustice of our hatred and of our rooted aversion towards them; and if, on the approach of death, we apparently hold out to them the hand of reconciliation, it is not that we love them more, it is because the expiring heart hath no longer the force to sustain its hatred, because almost all our feelings are extinguished, or, at least, because we are no longer capable of feeling any thing but our own weakness and our approaching dissolution. Let us then unite ourselves to the newly born Jesus Christ; let us enter into the spirit of that mystery; with him let us render to God that glory which is his due; it is the only means of restoring to ourselves that peace, of which our passions have hitherto deprived us.

SERMON XXVII.

FOR THE DAY OF THE EPIPHANY.

MATTHEW ii. 2.

For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

TRUTH, that light of Heaven, figured by the star which on this day appeared to the Magi, is the only thing here below worthy of the cares and the researches of man. Truth alone is the light of our mind, the rule of our heart, the source of real joys, the foundation of our hopes, the consolation of our fears, the alleviation of our evils, the cure for all our afflictions: truth alone is the refuge of the good conscience, and the terror of the bad, the internal punishment of vice and recompense of virtue: truth alone immortalizes those who have loved it, and renders illustrious the chains of those who suffer for it, attracts public honours to the ashes of its martyrs and defenders, and bestows respectability on the poverty and abject state of those who have quitted all to follow it: lastly, truth alone inspires magnanimous thoughts, forms heroical men, souls of whom the world is unworthy, and sages alone worthy

of that name. All our endeavours ought therefore to be confined to making ourselves acquainted with it; all our talents to manifest it; all our zeal to defend it: in men we ought to look only for truth, to have no wish of pleasing them but by truth, to esteem in them only truth, and to be resolved that they never shall please us but through truth. In a word, it would appear that it should have only to shew itself, as on this day it did to the Magi, in order to be loved; and that it shews us to ourselves in order to teach us to know ourselves.

Nevertheless, it is astonishing what different impressions the same truth makes upon men. To some it appears as a light which directs their steps, and, in pointing out their duty, renders it amiable to them: to others it is as a troublesome, and, as it were, a kind of dazzling light, which vexes and fatigues them: lastly, to many it is as a thick mist, which irritates, inflames them with rage, and completes their blindness. It is the same star which, on this day, appeared in the firmament: the Magi see it; the priests of Jerusalem know that it is foretold in the prophets; Herod can no longer doubt that it hath appeared, seeing wise men come from the extremities of the east, to seek, guided by its light, the new King of the Jews. Nevertheless, how dissimilar are the dispositions with which they receive the same truth manifested to them!

In the Magi it finds a docile and sincere heart: in the priests, a heart mean, deceitful, cowardly, and dissembling: in Herod, a corrupted and hardened heart. Consequently, it forms worshippers in the Magi; dissemblers in the priests; and in Herod a persecutor. Now, my brethren, such is still among us the lot of truth: it is a celestial light which is shown to us, says St. Augustin; but few receive it, many hide and dim

it; and a still greater number contemn and persecute it: it shews itself to all; but how many indocile souls are there who reject it? How many mean and cowardly souls who dissemble it? How many black and hardened hearts who oppress and persecute it? Let us collect these three marked characters in our gospel, which are to instruct us in all our duties relative to truth: we find that truth is received, that truth is dissembled, that truth is persecuted. Holy Spirit, Spirit of Truth, destroy in us the spirit of the world, that spirit of error, of dissimulation, of hatred against the truth; and in this holy place destined to form ministers, who are to announce it even in the extremities of the earth, render us worthy of loving the truth, of manifesting it to those who know it not, and of suffering all for its sake.

PART I. I call truth that eternal rule, that internal light incessantly present within us, which, in every action, points out to us what we ought, and what we ought not to do; which enlightens our doubts; judges our judgments; inwardly condemns or approves us, accordingly as our behaviour is agreeable or contrary to its light; and, in certain moments more splendid and bright, more evidently points out to us the way in which we ought to walk, and is figured to us by that miraculous light which, on this day, conducted the Magi to Jesus Christ.

Now, I say that the first use which we ought to make of truth being in regard to ourselves, the church, on this day, holds out to us, in the conduct of the Magi, a model of those dispositions which alone can render the knowledge of truth beneficial and salutary to us. There are few, however they may be plunged in the senses and in the passions, whose eyes are not,

at times, opened upon the vanity of the interests they pursue, upon the grandeur of the hopes which they sacrifice, and upon the ignominy of the life which they lead. But, alas! their eyes are opened to the light, only to be closed again in an instant; and the sole fruit which they reap, from the truth which is visible to, and enlightens them, is that of adding to the misfortune of having hitherto been ignorant of it, the guilt of having afterwards known it in vain.

Some confine themselves to vain reasonings upon the light which strikes them, and turn truth into a subject of controversy and philosophy; others, with minds yet unsettled, wish, it would appear, to know it, but they seek it not in an effectual way, because they would, at bottom, be heartily sorry to have found it: and lastly, others, more tractable, allow themselves to be wrought upon by its evidence; but, discouraged by the difficulties and the self-denials which it presents to them, they receive it not with that delight and gratitude which, when once known, it inspires. These are the dangers which we are taught to shun, by the example of the sages of the east towards that light, which came to shew them new paths to Heaven.

Accustomed, in consequence of a public profession of wisdom and philosophy, to investigate every thing, and reduce it to the judgment of a vain reason, and to be far above all popular prejudices, they nevertheless delayed not, before commencing their journey, upon the faith of the celestial light, to examine if the appearance of this new star might not be solved by natural causes; they did not assemble from every quarter scientific men, in order to reason on an event so uncommon; they sacrificed no time to vain difficulties, which generally arise, more from the repugnance

we feel to truth, than from a sincere desire of enlightening ourselves, and of knowing it. Instructed by that tradition of their fathers which the captive Israelites had formerly carried into the east, and which Daniel and so many other prophets had announced there, relative to the Star of Jacob which should one day appear, they, at once, comprehended, that the vain reflections of the human mind have no connexion with the light of Heaven; that the portion of light which Heaven shews them is sufficient to determine and to conduct them; that grace always leaves obscurities in the paths to which it calls us, in order not to deprive faith of the merit of submission; and that, whenever we are so happy as to catch a single gleam of truth, the uprightness of the heart ought to supply whatever deficiency may yet remain in the evidence of the light.

Nevertheless, how many beings do we not find, wavering in regard to faith, or rather enslaved by passions which render doubtful to them that truth which condemns them; how many, thus hesitating still, clearly see, that, at bottom, the religion of our fathers hath marks of truth, which the most proud and lofty reason would not dare to deny to it; that unbelief leads to too much; that, after all, we must hold to something; and, that total unbelief is a situation still more incomprehensible to reason than the mysteries which shock it; how many are there who see it, and who struggle, by endless disputes, to lull that worm of the conscience which incessantly reproaches their error and their folly; who resist that truth, which shews itself in the bottom of their heart, under the pretence of enlightening themselves; who apply for advice only that they may say to themselves, that their doubts are

unanswerable; who have recourse to the most learned, only to have the power of alleging, as a fresh motive of unbelief, the having had recourse in vain? It would seem that religion is no longer but a matter of conversation; it is no longer considered as an important affair in which not a moment is to be lost; it is a simple matter of controversy, as formerly in the Areopagus; it serves to employ idle time, and is one of those unimportant questions which fill up the vacancies of conversation, and amuse the languor and the vanity of general intercourse.

But, my brethren, "the kingdom of God cometh "not with observation." Truth is not the fruit of controversy and dispute, but of tears and groanings; it is by purifying our heart in meditation and in prayer that we alone must expect, like the Magi, the light of Heaven, and to become worthy of distinguishing and of knowing it. A corrupt heart, says St. Augustin, may see the truth; but is incapable of relishing or of loving it. In vain do you enlighten and instruct yourselves: your doubts are in your passions: religion will become evident and clear from the moment that you shall become chaste, temperate, and equitable; and you will have faith from the moment that you shall cease to have vice. Consequently, from the instant that you cease to have an interest in finding religion false, you will find it incontestable; no longer hate its maxims, and you will no longer contest its mysteries.

Augustin himself, already convinced of the truth of the gospel, still found, in the love of pleasure, a source of doubts and perplexities which checked him. It was no longer the dreams of the Manicheans which kept him removed from faith; he was fully sensible of their

absurdity and fanaticism; it was no longer the pretended contradictions of our holy book; Ambrose had explained their purport and their adorable mysteries. Nevertheless, he still doubted; the sole thought of having to renounce his shameful passions in becoming a disciple of faith, rendered it still doubtful to him. He would have wished either that the doctrine of Jesus Christ had been an imposition, or that it had not condemned his voluptuous excesses, without which, indeed, he was then unable to comprehend how either an happy or a comfortable life could be passed. Thus, always floating and unwilling to be settled; continually consulting, yet dreading to be instructed; by turns the disciple and admirer of Ambrose, and racked by the perplexities of a heart which shunned the truth, he dragged his chain, as he says himself, dreading to be delivered from it; he continued to start doubts merely to prolong his passions; he wished to be yet more enlightened, because he dreaded to be too much so; and, more the slave of his passion than of his errors, he rejected truth, which manifested itself to him, merely because he looked upon it as a victorious and irresistible hand which was at last come to break asunder those fetters which he still loved. The light of Heaven finds, therefore, no doubts to dissipate in the minds of the Magi, because it finds no passion in their hearts to overcome; and they well deserve to be the first-fruits of the Gentiles, and the first disciples of that faith which was to subjugate all nations to the gospel.

Not but that it is often necessary to add, to our own light, the approbation of those who are established, to distinguish whether it be the right spirit which moves us; fallacy is so similar to truth, that it is not easy to

avoid being sometimes deceived. Thus the Magi, in order to be more surely confirmed in the truth of the prodigy which guided their steps, came straight to Jerusalem: they consulted the priests and the scribes, as the only persons capable of discovering to them that truth which they sought; they boldly and openly demanded, in the midst of that great city, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" They proposed their question with no palliations, calculated to attract an equivocal answer: they were determined to be enlightened, and wished not to be flattered; from their heart they sought the truth, and, for that reason, they found it.

This is a disposition, alas! sufficiently rare among believers. We find not truth, because we never seek it with a sincere and upright heart; we diffuse a kind of mist over every attempt to find it, which conceals it from our view: we debate with ourselves, but we place our passions in so favourable a light, we exhibit them in colours so softened, and so similar to the truth, that we persuade ourselves that they are really so: we wish not to be instructed; we wish to be deceived, and to add, to the passion which enslaves us, an authority which may calm us.

Such is the illusion of the majority of men, and frequently even of those who, having become contrite, have quitted the errors of a worldly life. Yes, my brethren, let us search our own hearts, and we shall find, that, however sincere our conversion may otherwise be, yet there is always within us some particular point, some secret and privileged attachment, in regard to which we are not candid; with which our conscience is only imperfectly acquainted; the truth of which we seek not with sincerity, and it would even grieve us to

have found: thence it is, that the failings of the pious and good, always furnish so many traits for the ridicule of the worldly; and thence, we draw upon virtue continual reproaches and censures, which ought to light only upon ourselves. Nevertheless, to hear us speak, one would suppose that we love the truth, and are desirous of having it shewn to us. But a convincing proof that this is only a vain mode of speaking, is, that whatever concerns, or has any allusion to this cherished passion, is carefully avoided by all around us; our friends are silent upon it; our superiors are obliged to use an artful delicacy, not to injure our feelings; our inferiors are upon their guard, and employ continual precautions; we are never spoken to, but with soft expressions which draw a veil over our disease; we are almost the only persons ignorant of our defect: the whole world sees it, yet no one has the courage to make it known to us: it is clearly seen that we seek not the truth with sincerity; and that, far from curing us, the hand, which should dare to probe our sore, would only succeed in making a fresh one.

David knew not, and respected not the sanctity of Nathan, till after that prophet had spoken to him, with sincerity, of the scandal of his conduct; from that day, and ever afterwards, he considered him as his father and deliverer; but, with us, a person loses all his merit from the moment that he has forced us to know ourselves. Before that time, he was enlightened, prudent, full of charity, and possessed of every talent calculated to attract esteem and confidence; as John the Baptist was listened to with pleasure, formerly by an incestuous king: but, from the moment that he has undisguisedly spoken to us; from the moment that he has said to us, "It is not lawful for

"thee," he is stripped, in our opinion, of all his good qualities: his zeal is no longer but whim; his charity ostentation, or a desire to censure and contradict: his piety an illusion, by which pride is hid; and truth but a mistaken phantom. Thus, frequently convinced in our minds of the iniquity of our passions, we would wish others to give them their approbation; forced, by the inward testimony of the truth, to reproach ourselves with them, we cannot endure that they should be mentioned to us by others: we are hurt and irritated that others should join us against ourselves. Like Saul, we exact of the Samuels, that they approve, in public, what we inwardly condemn; and, through a corruption of the heart, perhaps more deplorable than our passions themselves, unable to silence truth in the bottom of our hearts, we would wish to extinguish it in the hearts of all who approach us. I was right, therefore, in saying, that we all make a boast of loving the truth, but that few court it, like the Magi, with an upright and sincere heart.

The little attention also, which they paid to the difficulties, which seemed to dissuade them from that research, is a fresh proof of its sincerity and earnestness. For, my brethren, how singular must not this extraordinary step, which grace proposed to them, have at first appeared to their mind! They alone, of all their nation, among so many sages and learned men, without regard to friends and connexions, in spite of public observation and ridicule, while all others either contemn this miraculous star, or consider the attention paid to it, and the design of these three sages, as an absurd undertaking, and a weakness, unworthy of their mind and knowledge, they alone declare against the common opinion: they alone entrust themselves

to the new guide which Heaven sends them; they alone abandon their country and their children, and reckon, as nothing, a singularity, the necessity and wisdom of which, the celestial light discloses to them.

The last instruction, my brethren, we derive from the gospel on the subject, is this. The reason why truth is always unavailingly shewn to us, is, that we judge not of it by the lights which it leaves in our soul, but by the impression which it makes on the rest of men with whom we live: we never consult the truth in our heart; we consult only the opinions which others have of it. Thus, in vain doth the light of Heaven a thousand times intrude upon us, and point out the paths in which we ought to tread; the very first glance which we afterwards cast upon the example of others who live like us, revives us, and spreads a fresh mist over our heart. In those fortunate moments when we consult only the truth of our own conscience, we condemn ourselves; we tremble over the future; we promise ourselves a new life; yet, a moment after, when returned to the world, and no longer consulting but the general example, we justify ourselves, and regain that false security which we had lost. We have no confidence in the truth which the common example disproves; we sacrifice it to error and to the public opinion; it becomes suspicious to us, because it has chosen out us alone to favour with its light, and the very singularity of the blessing is the cause of our ingratitude and opposition. We cannot comprehend, that, to work out our salvation, is to distinguish ourselves from the rest of men; to live single among the multitude; to be an individual supporter of our own cause, in the midst of a world which

either condemns or despises us; and in a word, to count example as nothing, and to be affected by our duty alone. We cannot comprehend, that, to devote ourselves to destruction, it requires only to live as others do; to conform to the multitude; to form with it only one body and one world: seeing the world is already judged; that it is the body of the antichrist which shall perish with its head and members; the criminal city, accursed and condemned to an eternal anathema. Yes, my brethren, the greatest obstacle in our hearts, to grace and truth, is the public opinion. How many timid souls are there, who have not the courage to adopt the righteous side, merely because the world, to whose view they are exposed, would join against them? Thus, the king of Assyria durst not declare himself for the God of Daniel, because the great men of his court would have reprobated such a step. How many weak souls are there, who, disgusted with pleasures, only continue to pursue them through a sense of false honour, and that they may not distinguish themselves from those who set them an example? Thus, Aaron, in the midst of the Israelites, danced around the golden calf, and joined them in offering up incense to the idol which he detested, because he had not the courage, singly, to resist the public error and blindness. Fools that we are! it is the example of the public alone, which confirms us against truth; as if men were our truth, or as if it were upon the earth, and not in heaven, that we ought, like the Magi, to search for the rule and the light which is to guide us.

It cannot be denied that the truth is frequently extinguished in our hearts, more by the sufferings and self-denials which it exacts, than by the respect we

feel for the opinion of the world: as it made sorrowful the young man mentioned in the gospel; and we do not receive it with the delight testified by the Magi on seeing the miraculous star. They had seen the magnificence of Jerusalem, the pomp of its buildings, the majesty of its temple, the splendour and grandeur of Herod's court; but the gospel makes no mention of their having been affected by that vain display of human pomp: they behold all these great objects of desire without attention, pleasure, or any exterior marks of admiration or surprise; they express no wish to view the treasures and the riches of the temple, as the ambassadors from Babylon formerly did to Hezekiah: occupied only with the light of Heaven manifested to them, they have no eyes for any earthly object; sensible to the truth alone which has enlightened them, every thing else is an object of indifference, or a burden to them; and their heart, viewing all things in their proper light, no longer acknowledges that either delight, interest, or consolation is to be found in any thing but the truth.

On our part, my brethren, the first rays of truth which the goodness of God shed on our heart, probably excited a sensible delight. The project which we at first formed of a new life; the novelty of the lights which shone upon us, and upon which we had not as yet fully opened our eyes; the lassitude itself, and disgust of those passions of which our heart now felt only the bitterness, and the punishment; the novelty of the occupations which we proposed to ourselves in a change; all these offered smiling images to our fancy; for novelty of itself is pleasing: but this, as the gospel says, was only the joy of a season. In proportion as truth drew near, it assumed to us, as it did to

Augustin while a sinner, an appearance less captivating and smiling. When, after our first glance, as I may say, of it, we had leisurely and minutely examined the various duties it prescribed to us; the grievous separations which were now exacted; the retirement, prayer, and self-denial which it proved to be indispensable; the serious, occupied, and private life in which we were to be engaged: ah! we immediately, like the young man of the gospel, began to draw back sorrowful and uneasy; all our passions roused up fresh obstacles to it; every thing now presented itself in gloomy and totally different colours; and that, which we had at first thought to be so attractive, became, when brought near, a frightful object, a path rugged, terrifying, and impracticable to human weakness.

Where are the souls, who, like the Magi, after having once known the truth, never afterwards wish to see but that alone; who have no longer eyes for the world, for its empty pleasures, or for the vanity of its pompous shews; who feel no delight but in the contemplation of truth, in making it their resource in every affliction, the spur of their indolence, their succour against temptation, and the purest delight of their souls? And how vain, puerile, and disgusting doth the world, with all its pleasures, hopes, and grandeurs, indeed appear to one who hath known thee, O my God! and who hath felt the truth of thine eternal promises; to one who feels that whatever is not thee is unworthy of him; and who considers the earth only as the country of those who must perish for ever! Nothing is consolatory to him but what opens the prospect of real and lasting riches; nothing appears worthy of his regard but what is to endure for ever; nothing has the power of pleasing him but what shall

eternally please him; nothing is longer capable of attaching him but that which he is no more to lose; and all the trifling objects of vanity appear to him but as the embarrassments of his piety, or gloomy monuments which recall the remembrance of his crimes.

Behold, in the instance of the Magi, truth received with submission, with sincerity, and with delight; in the conduct of the priests we may see the truth dissembled; and, after being instructed in the use which we ought to make of the truth with regard to ourselves, let us learn what is our duty, respecting it, to others.

PART II. The first duty required of us by the law of charity towards our brethren, is the duty of truth. We are not bound to bestow on all men attention, care, or officious services; but we owe to all the truth. The different situations in which rank and birth place us in the world, diversify our duties with regard to our fellow-creatures; but in every situation of life that of truth is the same. We owe it to the great equally as to the humble; to our subjects as well as to our masters; to the lovers of it as well as to those who hate it; to those who mean to employ it against ourselves, as well as to those who wish it only for their own benefit. There are conjunctures in which prudence permits us to hide and to dissemble the love which we bear for our brethren; but none can possibly exist in which we are permitted to dissemble the truth: in a word, truth is not our own property, we are only its witnesses, its defenders, and its depositories. It is that spark, that light of God, which should illuminate the whole world; and, when we dissemble or obscure it, we are unjust towards our brethren, and ungrateful towards the Father of Light who hath spread it through our soul.

The world is nevertheless filled with dissemblers of the truth; we live, it would appear, only to deceive each other; and society, the first bond of which ought to be truth, is become only a commerce of dissimulation, duplicity, and cunning. Now, in the conduct of the priests of our gospel, let us view all the different kinds of dissimulation of which men render themselves every day culpable towards truth; we shall there find the dissimulation of silence, the dissimulation of compliance and palliation, and the dissimulation of disguise and falsehood.

The dissimulation of silence. Consulted by Herod on the place on which Christ was to be born, the priests made answer, it is true, that Bethlehem was the place marked in the prophets for the fulfilment of that great event; but they did not add, that the star foretold in the holy books, having at last appeared, and the kings of Saba and of Arabia coming with presents to worship the new chief who was to lead Israel, it was no longer to be doubted that the overshadowed had at last brought forth the righteous. They did not gather together the people, in order to announce this blessed intelligence; they did not run first to Bethlehem, in order, by their example, to animate Jerusalem. Wrapt up in their criminal timidity, they kept a profound silence; they iniquitously retained the truth; and while strangers come from the extremities of the east, loudly to proclaim in Jerusalem that the king of the Jews is born, the priests and the scribes are silent, and sacrifice to the ambition of Herod, the interests of truth, the dearest hope of their nation, and the honour of their ministry.

What a shameful degradation of the ministers of truth! The good-will of the prince influenced them

more than the sacred deposit of the religion with which they were entrusted; the lustre of the throne stifled, in their heart, the light of Heaven; by a criminal silence they flattered a king who applied to them for the truth, and who could learn it from them alone; they confirmed him in error by concealing that which might have undeceived him; and how, indeed, shall truth ever make its way to the ear of sovereigns, if even the Lord's anointed, who surround the throne, have not the courage to announce it, but join their efforts, with those who dwell in courts, to conceal and stifle it?

But this duty, my brethren, is, in certain respects, common to you as to us; there are, nevertheless, few persons in the world, even of those who set an example of piety, who do not constantly render themselves culpable towards their brethren, of the dissimulation of silence. They think that they render to truth all that they owe to it, when they do not declare against it; when they hear virtue continually decried by the worldly, the doctrine of the world maintained, its abuses and maxims justified, those of the gospel opposed or weakened, the wicked often blaspheming what they know not, and setting themselves up as judges of that faith which shall judge them; that they listen to them, I say, without joining in their impiety, is true: but they do not boldly shew their disapprobation, and content themselves with not authorizing by their suffrage, their blasphemies or prejudices.

Now, I say that, as we are all individually intrusted with the interests of truth, to be silent when it is openly attacked in our presence, is to become, in a measure, its persecutor and adversary. But, I may likewise add, that you, above all whom God hath enlightened, fail then in that love which you owe to your brethren,

since your obligations with regard to them augment in proportion to the grace with which God hath favoured you; that you render yourselves culpable towards God of ingratitude; and that you do not make a proper return for the blessing of grace and of truth with which he hath favoured you, in the midst of your extravagant passions. He hath illuminated your darkness; he hath recalled you to himself, while wandering in treacherous and iniquitous ways; he, no doubt, in thus shedding light through your heart, hath not had your benefit alone in view; he hath meant that it should operate as the instruction or as the reproach of your connexions, your friends, your subjects, or your masters; he hath intended to favour your age, your nation, or your country, in favouring you; for his chosen are formed only for the salvation or the condemnation of sinners. His design has been to place in you a light which might shine amid the surrounding darkness, and be a salutary guide to your fellow-creatures; which might perpetuate truth among men, and render testimony to the righteousness and to the wisdom of his law, amidst all the prejudices, and all the vain conclusions of a profane world.

Now, by opposing only a cowardly and timid silence to the maxims which attack the truth, you do not enter into the views of God's mercy upon your brethren; you render unavailing to his glory and to the aggrandizement of his kingdom, that talent which he had entrusted to you, and of which he will one day demand a particular and severe reckoning; I speak, more particularly of you who had formerly, supported with so much eclat, the errors and profane maxims of the world, and who had once been its firmest and most avowed apologist. He surely had a right to exact of you, that you should declare yourselves with the same

courage in favour of truth: from a zealous partizan of the world, however, his grace hath only succeeded in making a timid disciple of the gospel. That air of confidence and intrepidity with which you formerly apologized for the passions, has forsaken you ever since you have undertaken the defence of the interests of virtue; that audacity which once imposed silence on truth, is now itself mute in the presence of error; and truth, which, as St. Augustin says, gives confidence and intrepidity to all who have it on their side, has rendered you only weak and timid.

I admit, that there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak; and that the zeal of truth hath its rules and measures; but I would not that those who know God and serve him continually, should hear the maxims of religion subverted, the reputation of their brethren attacked, the most criminal abuses of the world justified, without having the courage to adopt the cause of that truth which they dishonour. I would not that the world should have its avowed partizans, and that Jesus Christ should have no one to stand up for him. I would not that the pious and virtuous should, through a mistaken idea of good-breeding, dissemble with regard to those irregularities which they are daily witnessing; while sinners, on the contrary, consider themselves important and fashionable when they defend and maintain them in their presence. I would that the faithful Christian should comprehend that he is responsible to the truth alone; that he is upon the earth only to render glory to the truth: I would that he should bear upon his countenance that noble, and, I may say, lofty dignity, which grace inspires; that heroical candour which contempt of the world and all its glory produces; that generous and Christian liberty.

which expects only eternal riches, which has no hope but in God, which dreads nothing but the conscience, which pays court to, and spares nothing but the interests of righteousness and of charity, and which has no wish of making itself agreeable but by the truth. I would that the presence alone of the righteous should impose silence on the enemies of virtue; that they should respect that character of truth which he should bear engraven on his forehead; that they should crouch under his holy greatness of soul, and that they should render homage, at least by their silence and their confusion, to that virtue which they inwardly despise. Thus, the Israelites, taken up with their dances, their profane rejoicings, and their foolish and impious shouts around the golden calf, ceased in a moment, and kept a profound silence at the appearance alone of Moses, who came down from the mountain, armed with the law of God and with his eternal truth. The first dissimulation of the truth, therefore, is the dissimulation of silence.

Again, the truth may be dissembled by modifications and palliatives, injurious to its cause. The Magi, no doubt, could not be ignorant, that the intelligence which they came to announce to Jerusalem would be highly displeasing to Herod. That foreigner, through his artifices, had seated himself on the throne of David; he did not enjoy the fruit of his usurpation, so peaceably, but that he constantly had a dread lest some heir of the blood of the kings of Judah, should expel him from the heritage of his fathers, and remount a throne promised to his posterity. With what eye must he then have regarded men who came to publish, in the midst of Jerusalem, that the King of the Jews was born, and to proclaim him to a people so

attached to, and so zealous for the blood of David, and so impatient under every foreign rule? Nevertheless, the Magi concealed nothing of what they had seen in the east; they did not soften that great event by measured expressions less proper to arouse the jealousy of Herod. They might have called the Messiah whom they sought, the Messenger of Heaven, or the long-looked-for of nations; they might have designated him by titles less hateful to the ambition of Herod: but, full of the truth which had appeared to them, they knew none of these timid and servile acts of caution. Persuaded that those, who are determined to receive the truth, only through the means of their errors, are unworthy of knowing it, they disdained to hide it under the unworthy cover of personal considerations; they came boldly to the point, and asked, "Where is "he that is born King of the Jews?" and, not satisfied with considering him as the Sovereign of Judea, they declare that heaven itself is his birthright, that the stars are his, and appear in the firmament only in obedience to his orders.

The priests and the scribes, on the contrary, forced, by the evidence of the scriptures, to render glory to the truth, soften it by guarded expressions. They endeavour to unite that respect which they owe to the truth, with that complaisance which they wish still to preserve for Herod; they suppress the title of king, which the Magi had given, and which had so often been bestowed by the prophets upon the Messiah; they designate him by a title which might equally mark an authority of doctrine, or of superior power: they announce him rather as a legislator, established to regulate the manners, than as a sovereign raised up for the deliverance of his people from bondage. And,

notwithstanding they themselves expect a Messiah, as a King. and Conqueror, they soften the truth which they wish to announce, and complete the blindness of Herod, with whom they temporize.

Such is the deplorable destiny of the great! the voice of the minister of God, loses its strength when addressed to them; from the moment that their passions are known, they are temporized with; truth never offers itself to them but with a double face, of which one side is always favourable to them; the servants of God wish not avowedly to betray their ministry and the interests of truth; but they wish to reconcile them with their own interest: they endeavour to save, as it were, both the precept and their passions, as if the passions could subsist with that precept which condemns them. It seldom happens that the great are instructed, because it seldom happens that the intention is not to please in instructing them. Nevertheless, the greater part would love the truth, were it once made known to them. The passions and extravagancies of the age, nourished by all the pleasures which surround them, may lead them astray; but a remnant of religion renders truth always respectable to them. We may venture to say, that ignorance condemns more princes and persons of high rank, than people of the lowest condition; and, that the mean complaisance which is paid to them, is more dishonourable to the ministry, and is the cause of more reproach to religion, than the most notorious scandals which afflict the church.

The conduct of these priests appears base to you, my brethren: but, if you are disposed to judge yourselves, and to follow yourselves through the detail of your duties, of your friendships, and of your conver-

sations, you will see that all your discourses, and all your proceedings, are merely softenings and modifications of the truth, in order to reconcile it with the prejudices, or the passions of those with whom it is your lot to live. We never hold out the truth to them, but in a point of view in which it may please; in their most despicable vices we always find some favourable side; and, as the passions have always some apparent resemblance to virtue, we never fail to save ourselves through the aid of that resemblance.

Thus, in the presence of an ambitious person, we never fail to hold forth the love of glory, and the desire of exalting one's self, only as tendencies which give birth to great men; we flatter his pride; we inflame his desires with hopes, and with false and chimerical predictions; we nourish the error of his imagination by bringing phantoms within his reach, upon which he incessantly feasts himself. We perhaps venture, in general terms, to pity men, who interest themselves so deeply, for things which chance alone bestows, and of which death shall perhaps deprive us to-morrow; but we have not the courage to censure the madman who, to that shadow, sacrifices his quiet, his life, and his conscience. With a vindictive person, we justify resentment and anger; we lessen the guilt in his mind, by countenancing the justice of his accusations; we spare his passion, in exaggerating the injury and fault of his enemy. We perhaps venture to say, how noble it is to forgive; but we have not the courage to add, that the first step towards forgiveness is the ceasing to speak of an injury received.

With a courtier equally discontented with his own fortune, and jealous of that of others, we never fail to speak of his rivals in the most unfavourable terms:

we artfully spread a cloud over their merit and their glory, lest they should injure the jealous eyes of him who listens to us: we diminish, we cast a shade over the fame of their talents, and of their services; and, by our iniquitous compliance with his passion, we nourish it, we assist him in blinding himself, and induce him to consider all those honours which are bestowed upon his brethren, as unjustly ravished from himself. What shall I say? With a prodigal, his profusion is, in our mouths, but a display of generosity and magnificence. With a miser, his sordid callousness of heart, in which every feeling is lost, is but a prudent moderation, and a laudable domestic economy. With a person of high rank, his prejudices and his errors always find in us ready apologies; we respect his passions equally as his authority, and his prejudices always become our own. Lastly, We catch the infection, and imbibe the errors of all with whom we live; we transform ourselves into other beings; our great study is to find out their weaknesses, that we may appropriate and apply them to our own purposes; we have, in fact, no language of our own; we always speak the language of others; our discourses are merely a repetition of their prejudices; and this infamous debasement of truth we call knowledge of the world, a prudence which knows its own interest, the great art of pleasing and of succeeding in the world. "O ye sons of men! how long "will ye love vanity, and seek after *leasing?*"

Yes, my brethren, by this we perpetuate error among men; we authorize every deceit; we justify every false maxim; we give an air of innocence to every vice; we maintain the reign of the world, and of its doctrine, against that of Jesus Christ; we corrupt society, of which truth ought to be the first tie; we

pervert into snares and opportunities of temptation, those duties and mutual offices of civil life, which were established to animate us to virtue; we change friendship, which ought to be a great resource to us against our errors and irregularities, into a commerce of dissimulation and mutual deception: by this, in a word, we render truth hateful and ridiculous, by rendering it rare among men; and, when I say we, I mean more especially the souls who belong to God, and who are intrusted with the interests of truth upon the earth. Yes, my brethren, I would that faithful souls had a language peculiar to them amid the world; that other maxims, and other sentiments, were found in them than in the rest of men; and, while all others speak the language of the passions, that they alone should speak the language of truth. I would that, while the world hath its Balaams, who, by their language and counsels, authorize irregularity and licentiousness, piety had its Phineases, who durst boldly adopt the interests of the law of God, and of the sanctity of its maxims: that, while the world hath its impious philosophers and false sages, who think that it does them honour openly to proclaim, that we ought to live only for the present, and that the end of man is, in no respect, different from that of the beast; piety had its Solomons, who, undeceived by their own experience, durst publicly avow, that, excepting the fear of the Lord and the observance of his commandments, all else is vanity and vexation of spirit: that, while the world hath its charms and enchantments, which seduce kings and people by their delusions and flatteries, piety had its Moses' and its Aarons, who had the courage to confound, by the force of truth alone, their imposition and artifice: in a word, that, while the world

hath its priests and its scribes, who, like those of the gospel, weaken the truth; piety had its Magi, who dread not to announce it in the presence even of those to whom it cannot but be displeasing.

Not that I condemn the modifications of a sage prudence, which apparently gives up something to the prejudices of men, only that it may more surely recall them to rule and duty. I know that truth loves neither rash nor indiscreet defenders; that the passions of men require a certain deference and management; that they are in the situation of sick persons, to whom it is often necessary to disguise and render palatable their medicines, and to cure them without their privity. I know that some species of temporizing and management, the tendency of which is to establish the truth, are not weakeners, but auxiliaries of it; and that the great rule of the zeal of truth, is prudence and charity. But such is not the intention with those, who weaken it by flattering and servile adulations; they seek to please, and not to edify; they substitute themselves in the place of truth; and their sole wish is to attract those suffrages which are due to it alone. And, let it not be said that it is more through sourness and ostentation, than through charity, that the just claim a merit in disdaining to betray truth. The world, which is always involved in deceit, the commerce of which is carried on only by dissimulation and artifice, even which considers these as an honourable science, and which is totally unacquainted with the noble rectitude of heart, cannot suppose it in others; it is its profound corruption which is the cause of its suspecting the sincerity and the courage of the upright: it is a mode of acting which appears ridiculous, because it is new to it; and, as it finds in it so marked a singularity, it

loves better to suppose that it is rather the consequence of pride, or folly, than of virtue.

From thence it comes, that the truth is not only disguised, but likewise openly betrayed. This is the last dissimulation of the priests mentioned in the gospel: the dissimulation of falsehood. They are not satisfied with quoting the prophecies in obscure and softened terms: but, seeing that the Magi did not return to Jerusalem, as they had intended, they add, no doubt in order to calm Herod, that, ashamed of not having been able to find that new King of whom they came in search, they have not had the courage to return: that they are strangers little versed in the knowledge of the law and of the prophets; and that the light of Heaven, which they pretended to follow, was nothing but a vulgar illusion, and the superstitious prejudice of a rude and credulous nation. And such must indeed have been their language to Herod, since they themselves act according to it, and do not run to Bethlehem to seek the new-born King, in order, it appears, to complete the persuasion of Herod, that there was more credulity than truth in the superstitious research of these Magi.

And observe now to what we at last come: in consequence of a servile compliance with the passions of men, and of a continual wish to please them at the expence of truth, we at last openly abandon it; we openly sacrifice it like cowards, to our interest, our fortune, and our reputation; we betray our conscience, our duty, and our understanding; and, consequently, from the moment that truth becomes irksome to us, or renders us displeasing, we disavow it, and deliver it up to oppression and iniquity; and like Peter, we deny that we have ever been seen as its disciple. In this

manner we change our heart into a cowardly and groveling one, to which any profitable falsehood costs nothing; into an artificial and pliable heart, which assumes every form, and never possesses any determinate one; into a weak and flattering heart, which has not the courage to refuse its suffrage to any thing but unprofitable and unfortunate virtue; into a corrupt and interested heart, which makes subservient to its purposes, religion, truth, justice, and all that is most sacred among men; in a word, into a heart capable of every thing except that of being true, noble, and sincere. And think not that sinners of this description are so very rare in the world. We shun only the notoriety and shame of these faults; secret and secure basenesses find few scrupulous hearts, and we often love only the reputation and glory of truth.

It is only proper to take care that, in pretending to defend the truth, we are not defending the mere illusions of our own mind. Pride, ignorance, and self-conceit, every day furnish error with defenders equally intrepid and obstinate as any of whom faith can boast. The only truth worthy of our love, of our zeal, and of our courage, is that held out to us by the church; for this alone we ought to endure every thing; beyond it, we become only the martyrs of our own obstinacy and vanity.

O my God! pour then through my soul, that humble and generous love of the truth, with which thy chosen are filled in heaven, and which is the only characteristic mark of the just upon the earth. Let me live only to render glory to thine eternal truths; let me honour them through the sanctity of my manners; let me defend them through zeal for thy interests alone, and enable me continually to oppose them to

error and vanity: annihilate in my heart those human fears, that prudence of the flesh which dreads to lay open to persons their errors and their vices. Let me not be a feeble reed which bends to every blast, and let me never blush to bear the truth imprinted on my forehead, as the most illustrious title with which thy creature can glorify himself, and as the most glorious mark of thy mercies upon my soul. It is not indeed sufficient to be the witness and depository of it, it is also necessary to be its champion: a character opposite to that of Herod, who, as we see in our text, was its enemy and persecutor.

PART III. If it be a crime to withstand the truth when it shines upon us; iniquitously to withhold it when we owe it to others; it is the fulness of iniquity, and the most marked character of reprobation, to persecute and combat it. Nothing however is more common in the world than this persecution of truth; and the impious Herod, who, on the present occasion, set himself up in opposition to it, has more imitators than is supposed.

For, in the first place, He persecuted it through that repugnancy which he plainly evinced for the truth, and which induced all Jerusalem to follow his example; and this is what I call the persecution of scandal. Secondly, He persecuted it by endeavouring to corrupt the priests, and even by laying snares for the piety of the Magi; and this may be called the persecution of seduction. Lastly, He persecuted it by shedding innocent blood; and this is the persecution of power and violence. Now, my brethren, if the brevity of a discourse permitted me to examine these three descriptions of persecution of the truth, there is not perhaps one of them of which you would not find yourselves culpable.

For, Who can flatter himself, in the first place, with not being among the number of the persecutors of truth, by means of scandal? I speak not of those disorderly persons who have erected the standard of guilt and licentiousness, and who pay little, if indeed any, attention to the public opinion: for the most notorious scandals are not always those which are most to be dreaded; and avowed debauchery, when carried to a certain degree, occasions, in general, more censure of our conduct than imitation of our excesses. I speak of those who are delivered up to the pleasures, to the vanities, and to all the abuses of the age, and whose conduct, in other respects regular, is not only irreproachable in the sight of the world, but attracts even the praises and the esteem of men; and I say that they persecute the truth through the mere force of example; that they undo, as much as in them lies, the maxims of the gospel in every heart; by proclaiming to all men, that to shun pleasure is a needless precaution; that love of the world and the love of virtue are not at all incompatible; that a taste for theatres, for dress, and for all public amusements, is entirely innocent; and that it is easy to lead a good life even while living like the rest of the world. This worldly regularity is therefore a continual persecution of the truth; and so much the more dangerous, as it is an authorized persecution which has nothing odious in it, and against which no precaution is taken; which attacks the truth without violence, without effusion of blood, and under the smiling image of peace and society; and which, through these means, occasions more deserters from the truth than tyrants and tortures had ever power to do.

I speak of those good characters who only imperfectly fulfil the duties of piety, who still publicly re-

tain, some of the passions and maxims of the world: and, I say, that they persecute the truth through these unfortunate remains of infidelity and weakness; that they are the occasion of its being blasphemed by the impious and other sinners; that they authorize the senseless remarks of the world against the piety of the servants of God; that they are the cause of souls being disgusted with virtue, who might otherwise feel themselves disposed to it; that they confirm, in the path of error, those who seek pretexts to remain in it: in a word, that they render virtue either suspicious or ridiculous. Thus, as the Lord formerly complained, through his prophet Jeremiah, the backsliding Israel, that is to say, the world, justifies herself more than treacherous Judah; that is to say, in comparison with the weaknesses of the good: I mean to say, that the world thinks itself secure when it sees that those souls, who profess piety, join in its pleasures and frivolities; are eager, like the rest of men, for fortune, favour, preferences, and injuries; pursue their own ends, have still a desire of pleasing, seek with avidity after distinction and favour, and sometimes make even piety subservient towards the more surely attaining them. Alas! it is then that the world triumphs, and feels itself comforted in the comparison; it is then that, finding such a resemblance between the virtue of the good and its own vices, it feels tranquil with regard to its situation, and thinks that it is needless to change, since, in changing the name, the same things are still retained.

And here I cannot prevent myself from saying, with the apostle Peter, to you whom God hath recalled from the ways of the world and of the passions, to those of truth and righteousness; let us act in such manner

among the worldly, that, instead of decrying virtue as they have hitherto done, and of despising or censuring those who practice it, the good works which they shall behold in us, our pure and holy manners, our patience under scorn, our wisdom and circumspection in discourse, our modesty and humility in exaltation, our equality of mind and submission under disgrace, our gentleness towards our inferiors, our regard for our equals, our fidelity towards our masters, our universal charity towards our brethren, shall force them to render glory to God, make them respect and even envy the destiny of virtue, and dispose their hearts to receive the grace of light and of truth when it shall deign to visit and enlighten them upon their erroneous ways. Let us seal up the mouths of all the enemies of virtue by the sight of an irreprehensible life: let us honour piety, that it may honour us: let us render it respectable if we wish to gain partisans to it: let us furnish the world with examples which condemn it, and not censures which justify it: let us accustom it to think, that "Godliness is profitable unto all things," having promise not only of the life to come, but also peace, satisfaction, and content, which are the only good, and the only real pleasures of the present life.

To this persecution of scandal, Herod added the persecution of seduction: he tempted the sanctity and the fidelity of the ministers of the law: he wished to make the zeal and the holy boldness of the Magi instrumental to his impious designs: in a word, he neglected nothing to undo the truth before he openly attacked it.

Thus may you see another means by which the truth is persecuted. In the *first* place, We weaken the piety of the just by accusing their fervour of excess, and

by struggling to persuade them that they do too much; we exhort them, like the great tempter, to change their stones into bread; that is to say, to abate from their austerity, and to change their retired, gloomy, and laborious life, into a more ordinary and comfortable one: we give them room to dread, that the sequel will not correspond with these beginnings: in a word, we endeavour to draw them nearer to us, being unwilling to raise ourselves to a level with them. *2dly*, We perhaps tempt even their fidelity and innocence, by giving the most animated descriptions of those pleasures from which they fly: like the wife of Job, we blame their simplicity and weakness: we exaggerate the inconveniencies of virtue and the difficulties of perseverance: we shake them by the example of unfaithful souls, who, after putting their hand to the plough, have cast a look behind, and abandoned their labour: and still further: We perhaps attack even the immoveable groundwork of faith, and we insinuate the inutility of the self-denials it proposes, from the uncertainty of its promises. *3dly*, We harass, by our authority, the zeal and piety of those persons who are dependent upon us: we exact duties of them, either incompatible with their innocence, or dangerous to their virtue: we place them in situations either painful or trying to their faith: we interdict them from practices and observances, either necessary for their support in piety, or profitable towards their progress in it: in a word, we become domestic tempters with respect to them, being neither capable of tasting good ourselves, nor of suffering it in others, and performing, towards these souls, the office of the demon, who only watches in order to destroy. *Lastly*, We render ourselves culpable of this persecution of seduction, by making our talents instru-

mental to the destruction of the reign of Jesus Christ: the talents of the body in inspiring iniquitous passions, in placing ourselves in hearts where God alone ought to be, in corrupting the souls for whom Jesus Christ gave his blood: the talents of the mind in seducing to vice, in embellishing it with all the charms most calculated to hide its infamy and horror, in presenting the poison under the most alluring and seductive form, and in rendering it immortal by lascivious works; through the means of which a miserable author may to the end of ages, preach up vice, corrupt hearts, and inspire his brethren with every deplorable passion which had enslaved himself during life; shall see his punishment and his torments increased in proportion as the impious fire he has lighted up shall spread upon the earth; shall have the shocking consolation of declaring himself, even after death, against his God, of gaining souls from him whom he had redeemed, of still insulting his holiness and majesty, of perpetuating his own rebellion and disorders even beyond the tomb, and of making, even to the fulfilment of time, the crimes of all men his own crimes. Wo, saith the Lord, to all those who rise up against my name and glory, and who lay snares for my people! I will take vengeance of them on the day of my judgment: I will demand of them the blood of their brethren whom they have seduced, and whom they have caused to perish: and I will multiply upon them, and make them for ever feel the most dreadful evils, in return for that glory which they have ravished from me.

But, the last description of persecution, and one still more fatal to truth, is that which may be called the persecution of power and violence. Herod, having gained nothing by his artifices, at last throws off the

mask, openly declares himself the persecutor of Jesus Christ, and wishes to extinguish in its birth that light which comes to illuminate the whole world.

The bare mention of the cruelty of that impious prince strikes us with horror; and it does not appear that so barbarous an example can ever find imitators among us: the world is, nevertheless, full of this kind of public and avowed persecutors of the truth: and, if the church be no longer afflicted with the barbarity of tyrants, and with the effusion of her children's blood, she is still persecuted by the daily public ridicule which the worldly make of virtue, and by the ruin of those faithful souls, whom she beholds with grief, so often sinking under the dread of their derision and censures.

Yes, my brethren, that language which you so readily allow yourselves against the piety of the servants of God, of those beings who, by their fervent homage, make amends to his glory for your crimes and insults; those mockeries of their zeal and of their holy intoxication for their God; those biting sarcasms which rebound from their person upon virtue itself, and are the most dangerous temptation of their penitence: that severity which forgives them nothing, and changes even their virtues into vices; that language of blasphemy and of mockery, which throws an air of ridicule over the seriousness of their remorse; which gives appellations of irony and contempt to the most respectable acts of piety; which shakes their faith, checks their holy resolutions, disheartens their weakness, makes them, as it were, ashamed of virtue, and is often the cause of their returning to vice: this is what, with the saints, I call an open and declared persecution of the truth. You persecute in your brother, says St. Augus-

tin, that which the tyrants themselves have never persecuted; they have deprived him only of life; your scheme is to deprive him of innocence and virtue: their persecution extended only to the body; you carry yours even to the destruction of his soul.

What, my brethren! is it not enough that you do not yourselves serve the God for whom you are created? (Thus did the first defenders of faith, the Tertullians and the Cyprians, formerly speak to the Pagan persecutors of the faithful; and must we, alas! have the same complaints to make against Christians?) Is it not enough? Must you also persecute those who serve him? You are then determined neither to adore him yourselves, nor to suffer others to do it? You forgive every day so many extravagancies to the followers of the world, so many unreasonable passions; you excuse them; what do I say? you applaud them in the inordinate desires of their heart: and in their most shameful passions you find only constancy, fidelity, and dignity: You give honourable names to their most infamous vices; and shall a just and faithful Christian alone, a servant of the true God, have no indulgence to expect from you, and be certain of drawing upon himself your contempt and censures? But, my brethren, theatrical, and other amusements are publicly licensed, and nothing is said against them: the rage of gambling has its declared partisans, who are quietly put up with: ambition has its worshippers and slaves, and they are even commended: voluptuousness has its altars and victims, and no one opposes them: avarice has its idolaters, and not a word is said against them: all the passions, like so many sacrilegious divinities, have their established worship, without the smallest exception being taken; and yet the sole Lord of the

universe, the Sovereign of all men, and the only God upon the earth, shall either not be served at all, or shall not be served with impunity, and without every obstacle being placed in the way of his service?

Great God! avenge then thine own glory: render again to thy servants that honour and that lustre which the impious unceasingly ravish from them: do not, as formerly, send ferocious beasts from the depths of their forests to devour the contemners of virtue, and of the holy simplicity of thy prophets; but deliver them up to their inordinate desires, still more cruel and insatiable than the lion or the bear, in order that, worn out, and racked by their internal convulsions and the frenzies of their own passions, they may know all the value and all the excellence of that virtue which they contemn, and aspire to the felicity and to the destiny of those souls who serve thee.

For, my brethren, and you in particular to whom this discourse may be applicable, allow me, with grief to say it: Must you be the instruments which the demon employs to tempt the chosen of God, and, if it were possible, to lead them astray? Must it be that you appear upon the earth merely in order to justify the prophecies of the holy books with regard to the persecutions, which, even to the end, are inevitable to all those who shall wish to live in that godliness which is in Jesus Christ? Must you alone be the means of sustaining the frightful succession of persecutors of faith and of virtue, which is to endure as long as the church? Must you, in default now of tyrants and of tortures, continue to be the rock and scandal of the gospel? Renounce, then, yourselves the hope which is in Jesus Christ; join yourselves with those barba-

rous nations, or with those impious characters who blaspheme his glory and his divinity, if to you it appears so worthy of ridicule and laughter to live under his laws, and according to his maxims. An infidel or a savage might suppose that we, who serve and who worship him, are under a delusion; he might pity our credulity and weakness, when he sees us sacrificing the present to a futurity, and an hope, which, in his eyes, might appear fabulous and chimerical; but he would be forced, at least, to confess, that, if we do not deceive ourselves, and if our faith be justly grounded, we are the wisest and the most estimable of men. But for you, who would not dare to start a doubt of the certainty of faith, and of the hope which is in Jesus Christ, with what eyes, and with what astonishment would that infidel regard the censures which you so plentifully bestow upon his servants? You prostrate yourselves before his cross, he would say to you, as before the pledge of your salvation; and you laugh at those who bear it in their heart, and who ground their whole hope and expectation in it! You worship him as your Judge; and you contemn and load with ridicule those who dread him, and who anxiously labour to render him favourable to their interests! You believe him to be sincere and faithful in his word; and you look upon those as weak minds, who place their trust in him, and who sacrifice every thing to the grandeur and to the certainty of his promises! O man, so astonishing, so full of contradictions, so little in unison with thyself, would the infidel exclaim, how great and how holy must the God of the Christians therefore be, seeing that, among all those who know him, he hath no enemies but such as are of this description!

Let us, therefore, respect virtue, my brethren; let us honour, in his servants, the gifts of God, and the wonders of his grace. Let us merit, by our deference and our esteem for piety, the blessing of piety itself. Let us regard the worthy and pious as beings who alone continue to draw down the favours of Heaven upon the earth, as resources established to reconcile us one day with God, as blessed signs, which prove to us that the Lord still looketh upon men with pity, and continueth his mercies upon his church. Let us encourage by our praises, if we cannot strengthen by our example, the souls who return to him: let us applaud their change, if we think it impossible, as yet, to change ourselves; let us glory in defending them, if our passions will not, as yet, permit us to imitate them. Let us reverence and esteem virtue. Let us have no friends but the friends of God: let us count upon the fidelity of men only in proportion as they are faithful to their Master and Creator: let us confide our sorrows and our sufferings only to those who can present them to him, who alone can console them: let us believe only those to be in our real interests who are in the interests of our salvation. Let us smooth the way to our conversion: let us, by our respect for the just, prepare the world to behold us at some future day, without surprise, just ourselves. Let us not, by our ridicule and censures, raise up an invincible stumbling-block of human respect, which shall for ever prevent us from declaring ourselves disciples of that piety which we have so loudly and so publicly decried. Let us render glory to the truth; and, in order that it may deliver us, let us religiously receive it, like the Magi, from the moment that it is mani-

fested to us: let us not dissemble it, like the priests, when we owe it to our brethren: let us not declare against it, like Herod, when we can no longer dissemble it to ourselves, in order that, after having walked in the ways of truth upon the earth, we may all be one day sanctified in truth, and made perfect in charity.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

LUKE ii. 21.

His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel.

HUMAN reason is astonished and confounded at the idea of a God lowering himself to the standard of humanity; and into what an abyss of errors is it not plunged, if the light of faith come not speedily to its aid, to evince the depth of the divine wisdom concealed under the apparently absurd mystery of a Man-God? Thus, in all ages, this fundamental point of our holy religion, I mean the divinity of Jesus Christ, hath been the object most exposed to the foolish oppositions of the human mind. Men, full of pride, whose lips ought to utter only thanksgivings for the ineffable gift, made to them by the Father of mercies, of his only Son, have continually insulted him, by vomiting forth the most impious blasphemies against that adorable Son. Their blindness has prevented them from seeing that the mere name of Jesus, which was given to him on this day, the name which he first received

in heaven, and which an angel conveys to the earth, to Mary and to Joseph, is the incontestable proof of his divinity. That sacred name establishes him the Saviour of mankind; the Saviour, because through the effusion of blood, which becomes our ransom, he delivers us from sin, and from the consequences inseparable from it, the tyranny, namely, of the demon and of hell: the Saviour, because by attracting upon his own head the chastisement due to our prevarications, he reconciles us with God, and opens to us afresh the door of the eternal sanctuary, which sin had shut against us. But, my brethren, if the Son of Mary be but a mere man, of what value, in the eyes of God, will be the oblation of his blood? If Jesus Christ be not God, how will his mediation be accepted, while he would himself have occasion for a Mediator to reconcile him with God?

This proof, which I only touch upon here, and so many other proofs with which religion furnishes me, would quickly stop the mouth of the ungodly, and confound his impiety, if I undertook to shew them in all their light, and to amplify them in proportion to their importance. But, God forbid! that I should come here, into the holy temple where the altars of our divine Saviour are raised up, where his worshippers assemble, to enter into argument, as if I spake in the presence of his enemies, or to apologize for the mystery of the Man-God, before a believing people, and a sovereign whose most illustrious and most cherished title is that of Christian. It is not, therefore, to combat the ungodly, that I consecrate this day my discourse to the divinity and to the eternal glory of Jesus, Son of the living God; I come for the sole purpose of consoling our faith, while recounting the wonders of

him who is its Author and Perfecter; and to re-animate our piety in exposing to you the glory and the divinity of our Mediator, who is its object and its sweetest hope.

It is proper to renew, from time to time, these important truths in the minds of the great and of the princes of the people, in order to strengthen them against that language of infidelity which they, in general, are only too much in the way of hearing; and it is expedient sometimes to raise the veil which covers the sanctuary, that they may have a view of those hidden beauties which religion offers only to their respect and their homages.

Now, the divinity of the Mediator can only be proven by his ministry; his titles can appear only in his functions; and, in order to know whether he be descended from heaven, and equal to the most High, it requires only to relate the purposes for which he came upon the earth. He came, my brethren, to form an holy and a believing people; a believing people, who subject their reason to the sacred yoke of faith; an holy people, whose conversation is in heaven, and who are no longer responsible to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. Such was the great design of his temporal mission.

The lustre of his ministry is the firmest foundation of our faith: the spirit of his ministry, the sole rule of our morals. Now, if he was only a man commissioned of God, the lustre of his ministry would become the inevitable occasion of our superstition and idolatry; the spirit of his ministry would be the fatal snare to entrap our innocence. Thus, whether we consider the lustre or the spirit of his ministry, the glory of his divinity remains equally and invincibly established.

O Jesus, sole Lord of all, accept this public homage of our confession and of our faith! While impiety blasphemes in secret, and under the shades of darkness, against thy glory, allow us the consolation of publishing it with the united voice of all ages in the face of these altars; and form, we beseech thee, in our heart, not only that faith which confesses and worships thee, but also that which follows and imitates thee.

PART I. God can manifest himself to men, only in order to teach them what he is, and what men owe him; and religion is, properly speaking, but a divine light, which discovers God to man, and which regulates the duties of man towards God. Whether the most High shew himself to the earth, or whether he fill extraordinary men with his spirit, the end of all his proceedings can only be the knowledge and sanctification of his name in the universe, and the establishment of a worship in which man may render to him what is due to him alone.

Now, if the Lord Jesus, coming as he did in the fulness of time, was nothing more than an upright and innocent man, chosen only to be the messenger of God upon the earth; the principal end of his ministry would have been to render the world idolatrous, and to ravish from the divinity that glory which is his due, in order to appropriate it to himself.

In effect, my brethren, whether we consider the lustre of his ministry in the pompous train of oracles and of figurative allusions which preceded him, in the wonderful circumstances which accompanied him, or lastly, in the works which he hath operated; the lustre of it is such, that, if Jesus Christ were only a man similar to us, God, who hath sent him upon the earth, arrayed in such glory and power, would himself have

deceived us, and would be guilty of the idolatry of those who worship him.

The first striking character of the ministry of Jesus Christ is, that, from the beginning of the world, it was foretold and promised to men. Scarcely had the fall of Adam taken place, when the Restorer, whom his guilt had rendered necessary to the earth, is shewn to him from afar. In the succeeding ages, God, it would appear, is only occupied in preparing mankind for his coming: if he manifest himself to the patriarchs, it is in order to confirm their faith in that expectation; if he inspire prophets, it is in order to announce him; if he choose to himself a people, it is for the purpose of making it the depository of that glorious promise; if he prescribe sacrifices and religious ceremonies to men, it is in order to trace out in them, as from afar, the history of him who was to come. Whatever took place upon the earth seems to lead to that grand event: empires and kingdoms fall or rise only in order to prepare the way for it: the heavens are only opened to promise it: and, as St. Paul says, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain to bring forth the righteous, who is to come for the redemption of our body from the bondage of corruption and sin.

Now, my brethren, to inspire the earth, from the beginning of time, with the expectation of a man, and to announce him to it from heaven, is already, in fact, to prepare men to receive him with a kind of religion and worship; and, even granting that Jesus Christ were to have only the eclat of that particular circumstance to distinguish him from all other men, there would have been reason to fear the superstition of the people, with regard to him, were he only a simple created being. But, even the circumstance of Jesus Christ being fore-

told is not so wonderful as those circumstances in which he hath been placed, which are more surprising than even the prophecies themselves. In effect, if Cyrus and John the Baptist have been foretold, long before their birth, in the prophecies of Isaiah and of Malachi, these are only individual prophecies, without consequence or accompanying circumstances, and which are to be found only in a single prophet; they are predictions which announce only particular events, and by which the religion of the people could never be overcome; Cyrus to be the re-establisher of the walls of Jerusalem; John the Baptist to prepare the way for him who was to come; both in order to confirm, by the accomplishment of their particular prophecies, the truth and the divinity of all the prophecies which announce Jesus Christ.

But here, my brethren, we find a Messenger of Heaven, foretold by a whole people, announced, during four thousand years, by a long train of prophecies, desired of all nations, figured by all the ceremonies, expected by all the just, and shewn from afar in all ages. The dying wish of the patriarchs is to see him: the just live in that expectation: fathers teach their children to wish for him; and this desire is like a domestic religion which is perpetuated from age to age. The prophets themselves of the gentiles see the Star of Jacob shining from afar; and this great event is announced even in the oracles of idols. Here, the prophecy is not for a particular event; it tells of the coming of one who is to be the resource of the condemned world, the legislator of all people, the light of nations, and the salvation of Israel; who is to blot out iniquity from the earth, to bring in eternal righteousness, to fill the universe with the spirit of God, and to

be the blessed bearer of an immortal peace to man. What a splendid train! What a snare for the religion of all ages, if such magnificent preparations announce only a simple man; and, more especially, in times when the credulity of the people so easily placed extraordinary men in the rank of gods!

Besides, when John the Baptist appears on the borders of the Jordan, afraid, it would seem, that the single oracle which had foretold him might become an occasion of idolatry to the people whom the fame of his sanctity attracted round him, he performs no miracles; he invariably says: "I am not he whom you "expect; but one mightier than me cometh, the latchet "of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose;" he is only watchful, it would appear, to prevent superstitious honours. Jesus Christ, on the contrary, whom four thousand years of expectation, of types, of prophecies, and of promises, had announced, with so much splendour, to the earth; Jesus Christ, far from forbidding the worship of the people with regard to himself, comes in full authority and might; he does miracles and deeds which no one had ever done before him; and, not only does he raise himself above John the Baptist, but he proclaims that he is equal with God himself. Had there been reason to dread the consequences of a mistake, and, if to render to him divine honours had been an idolatry, where would be his zeal for the glory of Him who sends him, or where would be his love for men?

And further, my brethren, all the extraordinary men of whom the preceding ages could boast, all the just of the law and of the age of the patriarchs, had been only the imperfect types of Christ; and each of them represented only some individual trait of his life and minis-

try; Melchizedec, his priesthood; Abraham, his quality of Head and Father of believers; Isaac, his sacrifice; Job, his persecutions and sufferings; Moses, his office of Mediator; Joshua, his triumphant entry into the land of the living with a chosen people. All these men, however venerable and miraculous, were only rude sketches of the Messiah to come; and how great must have been the expectation of that Messiah, seeing his figures were so illustrious and brilliant! But, deprive Jesus Christ of his divinity and of his eternal origin, and the reality has nothing superior to the figure. I know, as we shall have occasion afterwards to mention, that, when we narrowly examine the lustre of his acts, we shall see them marked with divine characters which are not to be found in the life of those great men. But, to judge of them by the eyes of the senses alone, the parallel would not be favourable to Jesus Christ. Is he greater than Abraham, a man so illustrious, that the Lord himself, among his most splendid names, had taken that of the God of Abraham, as if in order to proclaim to the world that the homage of a man, so righteous and so extraordinary, was more glorious to his sovereignty than the title of God of empires and of nations: a man so illustrious, that the Jews believed themselves superior to all other nations of the earth, only because they were the posterity of that famous chief so cherished by Heaven; and that fathers, in recounting to their children the wonders of their nation, and the history of their ancestors, animated them to virtue, merely by putting them in remembrance that they were the children of Abraham, and the members of a holy race? Is he more wonderful than Moses, a man, so mighty in words and in deeds, the mediator of an holy covenant, who tore in pieces the yoke of

Egypt, and delivered his people from bondage; a man, who was established as the god of Pharaoh, who seemed the master of nature, who covered the earth with plagues, who divided seas, who caused a new kind of nourishment to be showered from heaven; a man, who saw the Lord face to face upon the holy mountain, and who appeared before Israel all resplendent with light? What is there more astonishing or more magnificent in the life of Jesus Christ? Nevertheless, these were only rude sketches of his glory and might: he was to be the last finishing and perfection of them. Now, if Jesus Christ were not the image of the substance of his Father, and the eternal splendour of his glory, he, at the utmost, could only be equal to these first men, and the incredulity of the Jews might, without blasphemy, demand of him: "Art thou greater "than our Father Abraham, or, than the prophets "which are dead?" I have then justly said, that if, in the first place, you estimate his ministry from the pompous train of oracles and of figures which announced him, the splendour is such, that, if Jesus Christ be but a man similar to us, the wisdom itself of God would be guilty of the mistake of those who worship him.

But, my brethren, Christ hath been foretold with his Members: we are comprised in the prophecies which have announced him to the earth: we have been promised as an holy race, a spiritual people, who were to bear the law engraven on their heart, who were to sigh only after eternal riches, and who were to adore in spirit and in truth: like Jesus Christ, we have been the expectation of the just of ancient times, and the desire of nations: we are that new Jerusalem, pure and undefiled, so often announced in the pro-

phets, where God alone was to be known and worshipped, where faith was to be the only light to illuminate us, charity the only bond of union, and the land of promise the only hope to animate us. Now, do we answer an expectation so illustrious and so holy? Are we worthy of having been the earnest desire of those distant ages which have preceded us? Do we merit to have been looked forward to, like celestial men, who were to fill the earth with sanctity and righteousness? Have not those ages been deceived in their expectation of the Christian people? Were the just of those distant times to return upon the earth, could we present ourselves to them, and say: Behold those celestial, spiritual, temperate, believing, and charitable men, whom you expected? Alas! my brethren, the just of former times were Christians before the birth of faith, and we are still Jews, under all the advantages of the gospel: we live for the earth alone: we know no true riches but the present good: our whole religion is founded on the senses: we have received more assistance, but we are not more believing.

To the lustre of the prophecies which have announced Jesus Christ, we must add that of his works and of his miracles: the second striking feature of his ministry. Yes, my brethren, even admitting that Heaven had not promised him to the earth with such magnificence; that the manner in which he was to appear to the earth had not constituted, during the first ages of man, the sole occupation and expectation of the universe; did ever man appear more wonderful, more divine in his actions, and in all the circumstances of his life?

I say, in the first place, in his actions and in his

miracles. I know, as we have just remarked, that, in the ages which preceded him, extraordinary men had appeared upon the earth, to whom the Lord seemed to have delegated his omnipotence and virtue. In Egypt and in the desert, Moses appeared the master of heaven and earth; in succeeding ages, Elijah presented the same sight to men. But, when we narrowly examine their power itself, we find that these miraculous men always bore with them the marks of weakness and dependance.

Moses only performed his miracles by the aid of his mysterious rod; without it he was only a weak and powerless man, and it would seem that the Lord had attached the virtue of miracles to that morsel of parched wood for the purpose of making the Israelites sensible that, in his hands, Moses himself was but a weak and fragile instrument, whom he was pleased to employ in the operation of great effects. Jesus Christ operates the greatest miracles, even without speaking; and the mere touch of his garment cures inveterate infirmities. Moses communicates not to his disciples the power of operating miracles; for it was an extraneous gift which he had received from Heaven, and which he had not the power of delegating: Jesus Christ leaves to his disciples a still greater efficacy than had appeared even in himself. Moses always acts in the name of the Lord: Jesus Christ operates in his own name; and the works of his Father are his. Nevertheless, Moses, who had not been foretold like Jesus Christ, who remitted not sins as he did, who never gave himself out as equal to God, but only as his faithful servant; this Moses, dreading that, after his death, his miracles should make him pass for a God, takes precautions lest, in the revolution of ages,

the credulity of his people should render to him divine honours: he goes up alone to the mountain, to expire far from the sight of his brethren, through fear of their coming to offer up victims upon his tomb, and forever removes his body from the superstition of the tribes: he does not shew himself to his disciples after his death; he contents himself with leaving to them the law of God, and employs every means to obliterate himself from their remembrance. Jesus Christ, after all the miracles which he operates in Judea, after all the prophecies which had announced him, after having appeared as a God upon the earth, leaves a tomb known to all the universe, and exposed to the veneration of all people and all ages; and even after his death shews himself to his disciple. Was superstition, then, less to be dreaded here? Or is Jesus Christ less zealous than Moses for the glory of the supreme Being, and for the salvation of men?

Elijah, it is true, raises up the dead; but he is obliged to stretch himself out upon the body of the child whom he recalls to life; and it is easily seen that he invokes a foreign power, that he withdraws from the empire of death, a soul which is not subjugated to him, and that he is not himself the master of life and death. Jesus Christ raises up the dead as easily as he performs the most common actions; he speaks as a master to those who repose in an eternal sleep; and it is thoroughly felt, that he is the God of the dead as of the living, and never more tranquil and calm than when he is operating the greatest deeds.

Lastly, The poets represent their sybils and their priestesses as under the influence of frenzy, while foretelling the future; and it would appear that they were unable to sustain the presence of the false spirit which

dwelt within them. Even our own prophets, when announcing future things, partook of a divine enthusiasm without losing the use of their reason, or departing from the solemnity and decency of their ministry; the soft sounds of the lyre were often necessary to arouse in them the prophetic spirit; it was easily to be seen that they were animated by a foreign impulse; and that it was not from their own funds they drew the knowledge of the future, and those hidden mysteries which they announced to men. Jesus Christ prophesies as he speaks; the knowledge of the future has nothing either to move, disquiet, or surprise him, because all ages are contained in his mind; the future mysteries which he announces are not lights infused of a sudden into his soul; they are familiar objects to him, which are always present to his view, and the images of which he finds within himself; and all ages to come, are under the immensity of his regards, as the present day which illuminates us. Thus, neither the resurrection of the dead, nor the foretelling of the future, ever injures his natural tranquillity; he amuses himself, if I may venture to say so, in operating miracles in the universe; and if he, at times, appear to tremble and to be troubled, it is only when viewing the sin and the perversity of his people; because the more exalted one is in sanctity, the more horrors does sin offer; and because the only thing which a Man-God can view with trembling, is the spectacle of a conscience stained with crimes.

Such is the omnipotency of Jesus Christ: his miracles bear no mark of dependance: and, not satisfied with thereby shewing to us that he is equal to God, he also makes it known to us, that, whatever wonder is operated by his Father upon the earth, he likewise

operates, and that his Father's works are his. Hath any prophet, down to the period of Jesus Christ, spoken in this manner? and is there any one who, far from rendering glory to God as the author of every excellent gift, hath attributed to himself all the great things which it had pleased the Lord to operate through his ministry?

But, my brethren, if we have also been prophesied with Jesus Christ, we are moreover participators of his sovereignty over all creatures. Through faith the Christian is master of nature; all is subjected to him, because he himself is inferior only to God; all his actions ought to be miraculous, because they ought all to proceed from a sublime and divine principle, far above the powers of human weakness: we ought to be, as I may say, miraculous men; masters of the world, in contemning it; exalted above the laws of nature, by overcoming them; sovereign disposers of events, by a thorough and tranquil submission to them; more powerful than death itself, by wishing for it. Such is the sublimity of the Christian: and, how great must Jesus Christ have been, to have exalted human weakness to such a pinnacle of grandeur and might!

Finally, The last splendid character of his ministry is the marvellous, and, till then, unheard-of circumstances which compose the whole course of his mortal life. I know that he came in nakedness and humiliation; but, through these obscure and contemptible externals, what lustre are not even the enemies of his divinity forced to acknowledge there?

In the *first* place, although they consider him as a man similar to us, they, nevertheless, believe him to have been formed, through the invisible operation of the Most High, in the womb of a virgin of Judah, in

opposition to the common law of the children of Adam. What glory already for a simple created being!

Secondly, Scarcely is he born, when celestial legions sing the praises of the Lord, and give us to understand, that this birth renders glory to the Most High, and brings an eternal peace upon the earth. What then is this creature who can render glory to the Most High, whose glory is in himself alone? Immediately after this, a new star calls the wise men from the heart of the East; and, guided by that miraculous light, those righteous men come from the extremities of the earth to worship the new King of the Jews.

Trace all the circumstances of his life. If Mary bring him to the temple, a righteous man and an holy woman proclaim his future greatness; and, transported with an holy joy, they die with pleasure, after having seen him whom they call the salvation of the world, the light of nations, and the glory of Israel. The doctors, assembled in the temple, behold him, with terror, wiser and more enlightened in his infancy, than all the wisdom of old men. In proportion as he grows up, his glory unfolds itself: John the Baptist, the greatest of the children of men, humbles himself before him, and says that he is not worthy of performing the meanest offices to him. A voice from Heaven declares that he is the well-beloved Son. The affrighted demons fly from before him, are unable to support the mere presence of his sanctity, and confess that he is the holy of God. Collect together these testimonies so different and new, these circumstances so unheard-of and extraordinary: and ask what is this man who appears upon the earth with so much eclat? And are not the people who have worshipped him at least excusable?

But these are only the weak preludes of his glory.

When he privately withdraws himself from the Tabor, accompanied by his three disciples, his glory, impatient, if I dare to say it, at having hitherto been held captive under the veil of humanity, openly bursts forth: he appears all resplendent with light: the heavenly Father, who ought then, it would appear, to have warned them that this Jesus whom they beheld covered with so much glory, was only his servant and messenger, lest his glory should become an occasion of error and idolatry to the astonished disciples, the spectators of this sight, declares to them, on the contrary, that this is his well-beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased, and affixes no bounds to the homages which, according to his pleasure, they are to render to him. When Moses appeared surrounded with glory, and, as it were, transfigured on mount Sinai, afraid lest the Israelites, always superstitious, should consider him as a god descended upon the earth, the Lord, amid a flame of fire, declared at the same time from on high, "I am "that I am, and thou shalt worship only me." Moses himself appears before the people with only the tables of the law in his hands, as if to let them know that, notwithstanding the glory with which they had seen him arrayed, he nevertheless was only the minister, and not the author of the holy law; that he could offer it to them only engraven on stone, and that it belonged only to God to engrave it on hearts. But, on the Tabor, Jesus Christ appears as the legislator himself: the new law is not given to him by his Father to bear it to men; he only commandeth them to listen to him, and from his own mouth he proposeth him as their legislator, or rather as their living and eternal law.

What more shall I say, my brethren? If from the Tabor we pass to mount Calvary; that place, in which

all the ignominy of the Son of Man was to be consummated, is not less, however, the theatre of his glory and divinity. Disordered nature confesses its Author in him; the stars are hidden; the dead arise; the stones of the tombs open of their own accord, and break in pieces; the veil of the temple is rent from top to bottom; even incredulity itself, confesses him through the mouth of the centurion: all testify that it is not an ordinary man who dies, and that things take place upon that mount totally new and uncommon.

Many righteous before him had died for the truth, by the hands of the impious: The palace of Herod had lately seen the head of the Precursor become the price of voluptuousness: Isaiah had rendered glory to God by a deplorable death, and, notwithstanding his royal blood, his august birth was ineffectual in sheltering him from those persecutions which are always the recompense of truth and zeal: many others had died for the sake of righteousness; but nature seemed uninterested in their sufferings; the dead forsook not their tombs, to come, as it were, to reproach the living with their sacrilege: nothing, in any degree similar, had, as yet, appeared upon the earth.

Survey the rest of his mysteries, and every where you will find traits which distinguish him from all other men. If he rise from the dead, independent of its being through his own power, (which no eye had ever yet beheld,) it is not to return again into the empire of death, like so many others, who had been raised up through the ministry of the prophets: he arises, never more to die; and, even here below, he receives an immortal life, a gift which had never yet been accorded to any creature.

If he is carried up into heaven, it is not in a flaming

chariot that vanishes in the twinkling of an eye; he ascends with majesty, and allows leisure to his affectionate disciples to worship him, and to accompany their divine Master with their eyes and homage. The angels, as if to receive him into his empire, come to greet this King of glory, and comfort the affliction of the disciples, by promising him once more to the earth, surrounded with glory and immortality. Every thing announces the God of heaven, who returns to the place from whence he came, and who is about to resume the possession of his own glory; at least, every thing inclines men to believe so.

And, in truth, my brethren, when Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, we find that a single disciple is the only spectator of that miraculous ascension; it takes place in a retired spot, removed from the view of the other children of the prophets, who, perhaps more credulous and less enlightened than Eliseus, might have been inclined to render divine honours to that miraculous man. But Jesus Christ, surrounded with glory, mounts up to heaven before the eyes of five hundred disciples: the weakest, and those who were least confirmed in the faith of his resurrection, are the first who are invited to the holy mountain: nothing is dreaded from their credulity: on the contrary, their adoration is permitted equally with their regrets and tears; and a life full of prodigies, till then so unheard-of on the earth, is at last terminated by a circumstance still more wonderful, and sufficient of itself to make him regarded as a God, and to immortalize error and idolatry among men.

In fact, my brethren, if the pagan world, in order to justify the ridiculous and impious homage which it paid to its legislators, to the founders of empires, and

to other celebrated men, announced, by means of historians and poets, that these heroes were not dead, but had only disappeared from the earth; and that, being of the same nature with the gods, they had ascended to heaven, in order to assume their station among the other stars, which, according to them, were so many divinities who enlighten us, and for the purpose of there enjoying that immortality to which their divine birth entitled them: if so very vulgar a fiction had of itself been able to render men so long idolatrous, what impression must not the reality of that fable have made upon the people? And if the universe had worshipped impostors, who were falsely said to have mounted up to heaven, would it not have been excusable to worship a miraculous man, whom men, with their own eyes, had seen exalted above the stars?

But observe, my brethren, that the subject of error finishes not with Jesus Christ; it is announced to us, that, at the end of ages, he will again appear in the heavens, surrounded with power and majesty, and accompanied with all the heavenly host: all assembled nations shall await, trembling at his feet, the decision of their eternal destiny: and in the character of sovereign, he will pronounce their decisive sentence. The Abrahams, the Moses, the Davids, the Elijahs, the John Baptists, and all that time has produced of great and wonderful, shall be submitted to his judgment and empire; he will himself be exalted above all power, all dominion, and all which is termed great in heaven and in the earth: he will erect his throne above the clouds, and sit on the right hand of the Most High: he will appear Master, not only of life and death, but the immortal King of ages, the Prince of eternity, the Chief of an holy people, the supreme Ar-

biter of all the created. What then is this man to whom the Lord hath delegated such power? And the dead themselves, who shall appear in judgment before him, shall they be condemned for having worshipped him, when they see him clothed with such glory, majesty, and power?

And one reflection, which I beg you to make in finishing this part of my discourse, is, that, if only a single extraordinary and divine trait were to be found in the course of a long life, we might be inclined to believe, that it sometimes pleaseth the Lord to allow his glory and his power to shine forth in his servants. Thus Enoch was raised up, Moses appeared transfigured on the holy mountain, Elijah ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot, John the Baptist was foretold. But, besides that these were individual circumstances, and that the language of those miraculous men and of their disciples, with respect to the divinity and to themselves, left no room for superstition and mistake; we find in this case an assemblage of wonders, which together, or even taken separately, would have been sufficient to deceive the credulity of men: in this case, all the different traits, dispersed among all these extraordinary men who had been considered almost as gods upon the earth, are collected together in Jesus Christ, but in a manner a thousand times more glorious and more divine. He prophecies, but more loftily, and with more striking characters, than John the Baptist: he appears transfigured in the holy mount, but surrounded with more glory than Moses: he ascends to heaven, but with more marks of power and majesty than Elijah: he penetrates into the future, but with more accuracy and clearness than all the prophets: he is produced, not only from a barren womb, like Samuel, but

likewise by a pure and innocent virgin: Nay more, not only he does not undeceive men by certain and precise expressions with regard to his origin as being purely human: but his mere language, with respect to his equality to the most High; the mere doctrine of his disciples, who tell us that he was in the bosom of God from all eternity, and that all hath been made through him, who call him their Lord and their God, who inform us that he is all in all things, would justify the error of those who worship him, had even his life been, in other respects, an ordinary one, and similar to that of other men.

O you! who refuse to him his glory and his divinity, yet, nevertheless, consider him as a messenger sent by God to instruct men; complete the blasphemy, confound him with those impostors who have come to seduce the world, since, far from tending to establish the glory of God and the knowledge of his name, the splendour of his ministry has answered only the purpose of erecting himself into a divinity, of placing him at the side of the most High, and of plunging the whole universe into the most dangerous, the most durable, the most inevitable, and the most universal of all idolatries.

For our part, my brethren, we who believe in him, and to whom the mystery of the Christ hath been revealed, let us never lose sight of that divine model which the Father shews to us from on high on the holy mount. Let us enter into the spirit of the various mysteries of which his whole mortal life is composed, for they are merely the different acts of the life of the Christian on this earth; and let us confess the new empire which Jesus Christ came to form in our hearts. The world, which we have hitherto served, hath never

been able to deliver us from our grievances and wretchedness. We vainly sought in it, freedom, peace, and the comforts of life; and we have found only slavery, disquiet, bitterness, and the curses of life. Behold! here is a new Redeemer, who comes to bring peace to the earth; but it is not as the world promises it that he gives it to us. The world had wished to conduct us to peace and happiness through the pleasures of the senses, through indolence, and a vain philosophy; it hath not been successful; by favouring our passions, it hath only augmented our troubles: Jesus Christ offers us a new way for the attainment of that peace and happiness which we seek after; detachment from, and contempt of the world, mortification of the senses, self-denial; these are the new riches which he displays to men. Let us be undeceived: we have no happiness to expect, even in this life, but by repressing our passions, and by refusing ourselves the gratification of every pleasure which disquiets and corrupts the heart: there is no philosophy, but that of the gospel, which can bestow happiness, or make real sages, because it is the gospel alone which regulates the mind, fixes the heart, and, by restoring man to God, restores him to himself. All those who have pursued other ways, have found only vanity and vexation of spirit; and Jesus Christ alone, in bringing the sword and separation, brings peace among men.

O my God! I know only too well that the world and its pleasures make none happy! Come then and resume thy influence over a heart which in vain endeavours to fly from thee; and which its own feelings of disgust recall to thee in spite of itself: be its Redeemer, its peace, and its light, and pay more regard to its wretchedness than to its crimes.

Thus would the lustre of the ministry of Jesus Christ operate as an inevitable occasion of idolatry in men, were he only a simple created being. Let us now see how the spirit of his ministry would become the snare of our innocence.

PART II. The lustre of the ministry of Jesus Christ is not the most august and most magnificent part of it. However dignified he hath appeared, in consequence of the oracles which have announced him, the works which he hath operated, and the shining circumstances of his mysteries, these are merely the outward appearances, as I may say, of his glory and of his grandeur; and, in order to know all that he is, we must enter into the principle and spirit of his ministry. Now, in the spirit of his ministry are comprised his doctrine, his favours, and his promises. Let us display these in their proper extent, and prove, either that we must deny to Jesus Christ his quality of a righteous man, and of a messenger of the Almighty God, which the enemies of his divinity grant him to have been, or we must admit that he is himself a God manifested in the flesh, and come down upon the earth in order to save mankind.

Yes, my brethren, this is an inevitable alternative: if Jesus Christ be holy, he is God; and, if his ministry be not a ministry of deceit and imposition, it is the ministry of eternal Truth itself, which hath been manifested for our instruction. Now, the enemies of his divine birth are forced to admit, that he hath been a man righteous, innocent, and the friend of God: and if the world hath beheld dark and impious minds, who have likewise dared to blaspheme against his innocence, and to confound him with seducers, these have been only some individual monsters who were

held in abhorrence by the human race, and whose names, too odious to nature, are for ever buried in the same darkness from which the horror of their impiety originally came.

In effect, what man, till then, had appeared upon the earth with more incontestable marks of innocence and sanctity than Jesus, the Son of the living God? In what philosopher had ever been observed such a love of virtue, so sincere a contempt of the world, so much charity towards men, such indifference for human glory, such zeal for the glory of the supreme Being, such elevation above whatever is admired or sought after by men? How great is his zeal for the salvation of men! It is to that object that he directs all his conversation, all his cares, all his desires, and all his anxieties. The philosophers criticised only man, and endeavoured only to expose their weakness or their absurdities: Jesus Christ never speaks of their vices but in order to point out their remedies. The former were the censors of human faults; Jesus Christ is their physician: the former gloried in being able to point out vices in others, from which they themselves were not exempted; he, on the contrary, never speaks, but with the most bitter sorrow, of faults, from which his own innocence protects him, and even sheds tears over the disorders of an unbelieving city: it is easily seen that the former had no intention to reclaim men, but merely to attract esteem to themselves, by pretending to contemn them; and that the only wish of the latter is to save them, and that he is little affected with their applauses or esteem.

Pursue the whole detail of his manners and of his conduct, and see if any righteous character hath ever appeared on the earth more generally exempted from

all the most inseparable weaknesses of humanity. The more narrowly he is examined, the more is his sanctity displayed. His disciples, who have it best in their power to know him, are the most affected with the innocence of his life; and familiarity, so dangerous to the most heroical virtue, serves only in his to discover fresh matter of wonder. He speaks only the language of Heaven: he never replies but when his answers may be useful towards the salvation of those who interrogate him. We see not in him those intervals, in which the man reappears, and on every occasion he displays himself the messenger of the Most High. The most common actions are extraordinary in him, through the novelty and sublimity of the dispositions with which he accompanies them; and, when he eats with the pharisee, he does not appear a man less divine than when he raises up Lazarus. Surely, my brethren, nature alone could never lead human weakness so far; we see nothing here of the philosopher who enjoins to others what he doth not himself, but the righteous character, who, in his own examples, adopts the rules and precepts of his doctrine; and holy must he indeed be, seeing that the very disciple who betrayed him, and who was so much interested to justify his own perfidy by an exposure of his faults, renders public testimony, however, to his innocence and sanctity; and since the whole challenged malice of his enemies hath never been able to convict him of sin.

Now, I say, that if Jesus Christ be holy, he is God; and that, whether you should consider the doctrine which he hath taught us with respect to his Father or with respect to men, it becomes only a mass of malignant equivocations, or hidden blasphemies, if he

be only an ordinary man merely deputed by God for the instruction of men.

I say, in the first place, if you consider it with respect to his Father. In effect, if Jesus Christ be but a simple messenger of the Most High, he comes, in that case, for the sole purpose of manifesting to idolatrous nations the unity of the divine essence. But, besides that his mission principally regards the Jews, who, for a long time past, had not returned to idolatry, and, consequently, needed not that God should raise up a prophet to reclaim them from an error of which they were not guilty, and a prophet whom they were taught from the beginning of the world to expect as the light of Israel, and the Redeemer of his people; independent of this circumstance, in what manner doth Jesus Christ fulfil his ministry, and what is his language with regard to the supreme Being? Moses and the prophets, charged with the same mission, invariably proclaimed that the Lord was one and the same; that it was impious to compare him to the similitude of the creature; and that they themselves were only his servants and messengers, vile instruments in the hands of a God, who, through them, operated great things. No dubious expression escaped from their mouths on so essential a point of their mission; no comparison of themselves to the supreme Being, always dangerous, in consequence of the natural tendency of man to prostitute his homages to men, and to raise up for himself palpable and visible gods; no equivocal term which might have blended themselves with the Lord, in whose name they spake, and have given birth to a superstition and an idolatry, to combat which they only came.

But, if Jesus Christ be only a messenger such as

they were, with how much less fidelity doth he fulfil his ministry! He continually says that he is equal to his Father; he acquaints us, that he hath come down from heaven, and that he hath quitted the bosom of God; that he was before Abraham; that he was before all things; that the Father and he are one; that eternal life consists in the knowledge of the Son, as well as in the knowledge of the Father; that whatever is done by the Father, the Son also doth. Had any prophet, down to Jesus Christ, spoken in a language so new, so strange, so disrespectful towards the supreme God, and, far from rendering glory to God as the author of every good gift, attributed to his own efficiency, the great things which the Lord had deigned to operate through his ministry? Every where he compares himself to the sovereign God; on one occasion, indeed, he says that the Father is greater than he; but what language is that, if he be not himself a God manifested in flesh? And would we not consider any man as a fool who should seriously tell us that the supreme Being is greater than he? Even to dare to compare himself with the divinity, is it not making himself equal to him? Is there any proportion either of greater or less between God and man, between the whole and nothing? Nay more, Jesus Christ is not content with saying that he is equal to God; he even justifies these novel expressions against the murmurings of the Jews who are offended at them; far from undeceiving them, he confirms them in the offence: on every occasion he affects a language, which, unless cleared up and justified by his equality to his Father, becomes either foolish or impious. If he be not God, what came he to do upon the earth? He came to scandalize the Jews, by giving them room to believe that

he compares himself to the most High; to seduce nations, by procuring to himself the adoration of the whole earth after his death; to spread fresh obscurity over the universe, and not, as he hath vaunted, to spread understanding, light, and the knowledge of God. What! my brethren, Paul and Barnabas rend their garments when they are taken for gods; they proclaim loudly to the people who wished to offer up victims to them: Worship the Lord alone, whose servants and ministers we are. The angel in the Revelation, when St. John prostrates himself to worship him, rejects the homage with horror, and says to him: "Worship "God alone; I am only thy fellow-servant, and of thy "brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." And yet Jesus Christ tranquilly suffers them to render divine honours to him! Jesus Christ praises the faith of the disciples who worship him, and who, with Thomas, call him their Lord and their God! Jesus Christ even confutes his enemies who contest his divinity and divine origin! Is he then less zealous than his disciples for the glory of him who sends him? Or is it a matter of less importance to him, pointedly to undeceive the people on a mistake so injurious to the supreme Being, and which, in fact, destroys the whole fruit of his ministry?

Yes, my brethren, what blessing hath the coming of Jesus Christ brought to the world, if those who worship him, be idolatrous and profane? All who have believed in him, have worshipped him as the eternal Son of the Father, the image of his substance, and the splendour of his glory. There is but a small number of men in Christendom, who, though they acknowledge him as a messenger of God, yet refuse him divine honours: even this sect, universally banished, and exe-

crable as it is even in those places where every error finds an asylum, is reduced to a few obscure and concealed followers; is every where punished as an impiety from the instant that it dares to avow itself; and is forced to hide itself in obscurity, and in the extremities of the most distant provinces and kingdoms. Is this then, that numerous people of every tongue, of every tribe, and of every nation, which Christ came to form upon earth? Is this that Jerusalem, formerly barren, but now become fruitful, which was to contain tribes and nations in its bosom, and where the most distant isles, princes, and kings, were to come to worship? Are these the great advantages which the world was to reap from the ministry of Jesus Christ? Is this, then, that abundance of grace, that plenitude of the Spirit of God shed over all men, that universal regeneration, that spiritual and lasting reign which the prophets had foretold with such majesty, and which was to attend the coming of the Redeemer? What! my brethren, is then an expectation so magnificent reduced to the miserable sight of the world plunged into a new idolatry? That event, so blessed for the earth, promised for so many ages, announced with so much pomp, so earnestly longed for by all the righteous, and held out from afar to the whole universe as its only resource, was then to corrupt and to pervert it for ever? That fruitful church, of which kings and Cesars, at the head of their people, were to be the children, was then to contain, in its bosom, only a small number of men, equally odious to heaven and to the earth, the disgrace of nature and of religion, who were obliged to seek, in obscurity, a shelter for the horror of their blasphemy? And all the future magnificence of the gospel was then, it would seem, to be limited to

the formation of the detestable sect of an impious Socinus?

O God! how wise and reasonable doth the faith of thy church appear, when opposed to the absurd contradictions of unbelief! How consoling for those who believe in Jesus Christ, and who place their hope in him, to behold the abysses which pride digs for itself when it pretends to open new ways, and to sap the only foundation of the faith and of the hope of Christians!

Behold, my brethren, how the doctrine of Jesus Christ, with relation to his Father, establishes the glory of his eternal origin. Thus, when the prophets speak of the God of heaven and of the earth, their expressions are too weak for the magnificence and the grandeur of their ideas. Full of the immensity, the omnipotence, and the majesty of the supreme Being, they exhaust the weakness of human language, in order, if possible, to correspond with the sublimity of these images. That God, is he who measures the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand, who weighs the mountains in his balance, in whose hands are the thunders and the tempests, who speaks, and it is done; who diverts himself in upholding the universe. It was natural for simple man to speak in this manner of the glory of the Most High; the infinite disproportion between the immensity of the supreme Being and the weakness of the human mind, must strike, dazzle, and confound it; and the most pompous expressions are too feeble to convey its astonishment and admiration.

But, when Jesus Christ speaks of the glory of the Lord, it is no longer in the pompous stile of the prophets: he calls him an holy Father, a righteous Father, a merciful Father, a Shepherd who pursues a strayed sheep, and kindly bears it home himself; a

Friend who yields to the importunities of his friend; a Father feelingly affected with the return and the amendment of his son: we clearly see that this is the domestic language of a Child speaking of its Father; that the familiarity and the simplicity of his expressions suppose in him a sublimity of knowledge which renders the idea of the supreme Being familiar to him, and prevents him from being struck and dazzled, as we are, with his majesty and glory; and, lastly, that he only speaks of what is laid open to his view, and what he possesses himself. A person is much less struck with the eclat of the titles which he has borne, if I may be allowed the comparison, from his birth: the children of kings speak, without emotion, of sceptres and crowns; and it is only the eternal Son of the living God who can speak so familiarly of the glory of God himself.

Behold, my brethren, (seeing we participate with Jesus Christ in all his blessings,) the right which he hath acquired for us, of considering God as our Father, of daring to call ourselves his children, and of loving rather than of fearing him. We serve him, however, like slaves and hirelings: we dread his chastisements, but we are little affected by his love and his promises: his law, righteous and holy as it is, has nothing pleasing for us; it is a yoke which oppresses us, which excites our murmurs, and which we would soon free ourselves from, were our transgressions against it to go unpunished: nothing is heard but complaints against the severity of its precepts, and arguments to support the propriety of those alleviations which the world always mingles with their practice: in a word, were he not an avenging God we would never confess him; and it is to his justice and to his

chastisements alone that he is indebted for our respect and homage.

But the doctrine of Jesus Christ, with relation to men, whom he came to instruct, doth not less establish the truth of his divine birth. For I speak not here of the wisdom, the sanctity, and the sublimity of that doctrine: every thing in it, is worthy of reason, and of the soundest philosophy: every thing is proportioned to the wretchedness and to the excellency of man, to his wants and to his exalted lot; every thing there inspires contempt for perishable things, and the love of eternal riches: every thing there maintains good order, and the peace and tranquillity of states: every thing there is great, because every thing is true: the glory of the deeds is more real and more shining in the heart than the deeds themselves. The wise man of the gospel seeks, from his virtue here below, only the satisfaction of obeying God, who will one day amply recompense him for it; and he prefers the testimony of his own conscience to all the applauses of men: he is greater than the entire world, through his exalted faith; and he is below the least of men, through the modesty of his sentiments. His virtue seeks not, in pride, the indemnity of its sufferings, for pride is the first enemy which it attacks; and, in that divine philosophy, the most heroical actions are nothing, from the moment that we count them as any thing ourselves: it considers glory as an illusion, prosperity as a source of misfortune, elevation as a precipice, afflictions as favours, the earth as a place of exile, and every thing that happens as a dream. What kind of language is this? What man prior to Jesus Christ hath ever spoken in this manner? And if his disciples, merely in consequence of having announced this divine doctrine, were taken

by a whole people for gods descended upon the earth, what worship shall they have it in their power to refuse to him who is the Author of it, and in whose name they announce it?

But, let us leave these general reflections, and come to the more precise duties of that love and dependance which his doctrine exacts of men with regard to himself. He commands us to love him, as he commands us to love his Father: he insists that we should dwell in him, that is to say, that we should establish ourselves in him, and seek our happiness in him, as in his Father; that we should direct all our actions, all our thoughts, all our desires, ourselves in fine, to his glory, as to the glory of his Father; sins themselves are not remitted but to those who sincerely love him; and all the righteousness of the just, and the reconciliation of the sinner, are the effects of the love which we have for him. What kind of man is this, who thus usurps the place of God in our hearts? Is a creature worthy of being loved for itself; and is not every noble and estimable quality which it may possess, the sole gift of him who alone is worthy of being beloved?

What prophet prior to Jesus Christ had ever spoken thus to men: You shall love me, and whatever you do, you shall do it for my glory. You shall love the Lord your God, said Moses to the children of Israel. Nothing is amiable in itself but what can bestow happiness upon us: now, no creature can be our happiness, or our perfection: no creature, consequently, is worthy of being loved for itself; for this would be an idolatry. Any man, who comes to propose himself to men as the object of their love, is impious, and an impostor, who seeks to usurp the most essential right of the supreme Being: he is a monster of pride and folly,

who wishes to erect altars to himself, even in our hearts, the only sanctuary which the divinity had never yielded up to profane idols. The doctrine of Jesus Christ, that doctrine so divine, and so much admired even by pagans, would, in that case, become only a monstrous mixture of impiety, of presumption, and of folly, if, not being himself the God blessed in all ages, he had made that love which he exacted of his disciples, the most essential precept of his morality; and it would be a ridiculous mark of ostentation in him, to have held himself out to men as a model of humility and modesty, while, in fact, he was carrying presumption and unlimited compliance to a degree far beyond all the proudest philosophers, who had never aspired to more than the esteem and the applause of men.

Nor is this all: not only does Jesus Christ insist upon our love, but he also exacts of men marks of the most disinterested and most heroical love. He requires of us to love him more than our relations, our friends, our fortune, or our life; more than the whole world, and more than ourselves; that we suffer all for his sake, that we renounce all for him, that we shed, even to the last drop of our blood for him: whoever renders not to him these acts of homage, is unworthy of him; whoever puts him in competition with any creature, or with himself, insults and dishonours him, and forfeits every pretension to his promises.

What! my brethren, he is not satisfied, as the idols, and even the true God himself had appeared to be, with the sacrifices of goats and bulls? He carries his pretensions still farther, and requires of man the sacrifice of himself; that he fly to gibbets; that he offer himself to death and to martyrdom for the glory of his name! But, if he be not the Master of our life, by

what right doth he exact it of us? If our soul be not originally come from him, is it to him that we ought to return it? Is that regaining it, to have lost it for his sake? If he be not the Author of our existence, do we not become sacrilegious and suicides, when we sacrifice ourselves for his glory, and when we transfer to a creature, and to a simple messenger of God, the great sacrifice of our being, destined only to confess the sovereignty and the power of the eternal Maker, who hath drawn us from nothing? That Jesus Christ should die himself, for the glory of God, was very proper, and even that he should exhort us to follow his example; many prophets before him had died for the Lord's sake, and had exhorted their disciples to walk in their steps. But that Jesus Christ, if he be not God himself, should order us to die for himself, should exact of men that last proof of love; that he should command us to offer up a life for him which we hold not of him; is it possible that men should have ever existed upon the earth so vulgar and so stupid as to allow themselves to be led away by the extravagance of such a doctrine? Is it possible that maxims so ridiculous and so impious should have been able to triumph over the whole universe, to overthrow all sects, to recall all minds, and to prevail over every thing which had hitherto appeared exalted, either in learning, in doctrine, or in the wisdom of the earth? And, if we consider as barbarians those savage nations who make a sacrifice of themselves upon the tombs and ashes of their relations and friends, why should we view, in a more respectable light, those disciples of Jesus Christ who have sacrificed themselves for his sake? And shall not his religion be equally considered as a religion of barbarity and of blood?

Yes, my brethren, the Agnes', the Lucias, the Agathas, those first martyrs of faith and of modesty, would then have sacrificed themselves to a mortal man. And, in preferring to shed their blood rather than to bend the knee before vain idols, they would have shunned one idolatry only in order to fall into another more worthy of condemnation, in dying for Jesus Christ. The generous confessors of faith would then have been only a set of desperate fanatics, who, like madmen, had run to meet death. The tradition of the martyrs would then be the narrative of an impious and bloody scene. The tyrants and persecutors would then have been the defenders of righteousness, and of the glory of the divinity, and Christianity itself a sacrilegious and profane creed. The human race would then have totally erred, and the blood of the martyrs, far from having been the seed of believers, would have answered no other purpose than that of inundating the whole universe with superstition and idolatry.—O God! can the ear of man listen to such blasphemies without horror? and what more is necessary to overthrow unbelief than to shew it to itself?

Such are our first duties towards Jesus Christ; to sacrifice to him our inclinations, our friends, our relations, our fortune, our life itself, and, in a word, whatever may stand in the way of our salvation; thus do we confess his divinity; thus do we acknowledge that he alone can supply the place of all that we forsake for him, and render us even more than we quit, by giving to us himself. He alone, says the apostle John, who contemns the world and all its pleasures, confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; because he thereby pronounces that Jesus Christ is greater than the world, more capable of rendering us happy, and consequently more worthy of our love.

But it is not sufficient to have considered the spirit of the ministry of Jesus Christ in his doctrine; it is necessary to consider it, secondly, in regard to the favours and blessings which the universe has received from him. He came to deliver all men from eternal death; from being enemies of God, as they were, he hath rendered them his children; he hath secured to them the possession of the kingdom of God, and of immutable riches; he hath brought to them the knowledge of salvation and the doctrine of truth. These gifts, magnificent as they are, have not ended even with him; seated on the right hand of his Father, he still sheds them over our hearts; all our miseries still find their remedy in him: he nourishes us with his body; he washes us from our stains by continually applying to us the price of his blood; he forms pastors to conduct us; he inspires prophets to instruct us; he sanctifies righteous characters to animate us by their example; he is continually present in our hearts to comfort all their wants: man hath no passion which his grace doth not cure, no affliction which it doth not render pleasing, no power but what springs from him: in a word, he assures us himself, that he is our way, our truth, our life, our righteousness, our redemption, and our light. What new doctrine is this? Can a single man be the source of so many benefits to other men? Can the sovereign God, so jealous of his glory, attach us to a creature, by duties and ties so intimate and sacred, that we almost depend more upon that creature than upon the Creator? Would there be no danger that a man, become so beneficial and so necessary to other men, should at last become their idol? That a man, the author and dispenser of so many blessings, and who discharges with regard to us, the office

and all the functions of a god, should likewise, in a little time, occupy his place in our hearts?

For observe, my brethren, that it is gratitude alone which hath formerly made so many gods. Men, neglecting the Author of their being and of the universe, worshipped, at first, the air which enabled them to live, the earth which nourished them, the sun which gave them light, and the moon which presided over the night: such were their Cybeles, their Apollos, and their Dianas. They worshipped those conquerors who had delivered them from their enemies; those benevolent and upright princes who had rendered their subjects happy, and the memory of their reign immortal; thus Jupiter and Hercules were placed in the rank of gods, the one for the number of his victories, and the other in consequence of the happiness and tranquillity of his reign: in the ages of superstition and credulity, men knew no other gods than those who were serviceable to them. Such is the character of man; his worship is only his love and gratitude.

Now, what man hath ever benefited mankind so much as Jesus Christ? Recollect all that the pagans have told us of the history of their gods, and see if they believed themselves indebted to them all that unbelief itself acknowledges, with the holy books, that the world is indebted to Jesus Christ. To some they thought themselves indebted for favourable winds and a fortunate navigation; to others for the fertility of seasons; to Mars for success in battle; to Janus for the peace and the tranquillity of the people; to Esculapius for their health. But what are these slight benefits, compared to those which Jesus Christ hath showered upon the earth? He hath brought to it an eternal peace, a lasting happiness, righteousness and truth; he hath made of it a new

world and a new earth; he hath not covered a single people with his benefits, he hath loaded all nations, the whole universe; and what is more, he hath become our benefactor only by suffering as our victim. What could he do more exalted or more noble for the earth? If gratitude hath made gods, could Jesus Christ fail to find worshippers among men? And, were it possible that any excess could take place in our love and in our gratitude to him, was it at all proper that we should be so deeply indebted to him?

Again, in his dying moments, our Saviour might have informed his disciples that to the Lord alone they were indebted for so many benefits, that he himself had been merely the instrument, and not the author and source of all these special favours, and that they ought, consequently, to forget him, and to render to God that glory which was due to him alone: but far differently than with such instructions doth Jesus Christ terminate his wonders and his ministry. He not only requires that his disciples should forget him not, and that they should not cease, even after his death, to hope in him; but, on the point of quitting them, he assures them that, even to the consummation of time, he will be present with them; he promises still more than he hath already bestowed upon them, and attaches them for ever to himself by indissoluble and immortal ties.

In fact, the promises which, in that last moment, he makes to them, are still more astonishing than all the favours he had granted to them during his life. In the *first* place he promises to them the consoling Spirit, which he calls the Spirit of his Father: that Spirit of the truth which the world cannot receive; that Spirit of energy which was to form the martyrs;

that Spirit of intelligence which was to enlighten the prophets; that Spirit of wisdom which was to conduct the pastors; that Spirit of peace and charity which was to make of all believers, only one heart and one soul. What right hath Jesus Christ over the Spirit of God, to dispose of it at his pleasure, and to promise it to men, if it be not his own Spirit? Elijah, ascending to heaven, looks upon it as a thing hardly possible to promise to Eliseus, individually, his two-fold spirit of zeal and prophecy: how much farther was he from promising to him the eternal Spirit of the heavenly Father, that Spirit of liberty which blows where he thinks fit! Nevertheless, the promises of Jesus Christ are accomplished; scarcely hath he ascended to heaven when the Spirit of God descends upon the disciples; the illiterate become at once more learned than all the sages and philosophers; the weak more powerful than tyrants; the foolish in the opinion of the world, more prudent than all the wisdom of the age. New men, animated with a new Spirit, appear upon the earth; they attract all to walk in their steps; they change the face of the universe; and, even to the end of time, shall that Spirit animate his church, form righteous souls, overthrow the unbelieving, console his disciples, sustain them amid persecutions and disgraces, and bear witness in the bottom of their heart, that they are the children of God, and that they are entitled through that august name, to more real and more solid riches than all those of which the world deprives them.

Secondly, Jesus Christ promises to his disciples the keys of heaven and of hell, and the power of remitting sins. What! my brethren, we see that the Jews

are deeply offended when he pretends to remit them himself, and when he seems to attribute to himself a power reserved to God alone; but, how will all nations of the earth be scandalized when they shall read, in his gospel, that he hath even delegated his power to his disciples? And, if he be not God, hath the mind of man ever imagined such an instance of temerity and folly? What right, indeed, hath he over consciences, to bind or to unbind them at his pleasure, and to transfer to weak men, a power which he himself could not exercise without blasphemy?

Thirdly, But this is not all; he promises to his disciples the gift likewise of miracles; that, in his name, they should raise up the dead; that they should restore sight to the blind, health to the sick, and speech to the dumb; that they should be masters of all nature. Moses promises not to his disciples the gifts with which the Lord had favoured him: he is sensible that the power is not his own, and that the Lord alone can bestow it on whomsoever he may think fit. Thus, after his death, when Joshua arrests the sun in the middle of his career, in order to complete the victory over the enemies of the people of God, it is not in the name of Moses that he commands that planet to stand still; it is not of him that he holds the power of making even the stars obedient to him; when he wishes to exercise it, it is not to him that he addresses himself: but the disciples of Jesus Christ can operate nothing but in the name of their Master; it is in his name that they raise up the dead, and make the lame to walk; and, without the assistance of that divine name, they are as weak as the rest of men. The ministry and the power of Moses terminate with his life; the ministry and the power of Jesus Christ only begin,

as I may say, after his death, and we are assured that his reign is to be eternal.

But, further. He promises to his disciples the conversion of the universe, the triumph of the cross, the compliance of all the nations of the earth, of philosophers, of Cesars and of tyrants; and that his gospel shall be received by the whole world: but does he hold the hearts of all men in his hands, that he can thus answer for a change of which the world had hitherto had no example? You will, no doubt, say, that God layeth open the future to his servant. But you are mistaken: if he be not God, he is not even a prophet; his predictions are dreams and chimeras: it is a false spirit which seduces him, and which is concerned in his knowledge of the future, and the sequel hath contradicted the truth of his promises: he prophesies that all nations, seated under the shadow of death, shall open their eyes to the light; and he sees not that they are on the point of falling into a more criminal blindness in worshipping him: he prophesies that his Father shall be glorified, and that his gospel shall every where form to him worshippers in spirit and in truth; and he sees not that men are about to dishonour him for ever, by placing upon an equality with him, even to the end of ages, that Jesus who ought to have been considered only as his servant and prophet: he prophesies that idols shall be overthrown; and he sees not that he himself shall occupy their place: he prophesies that he will form to himself an holy people of every tongue and of every tribe; and he sees not that he comes only to form a new people of idolaters of every nation, who shall place him in the temple as the living God; whose actions, worship, and homages shall all be directed to him; who shall do all for his

glory; who shall depend solely upon him, live only for and through him, and have neither force nor energy but what they receive from him: in a word, who shall worship him, who shall love him a thousand times more spiritually, more intimately, and more universally, than ever the pagans had worshipped their idols. This, then, is not even a prophet; and his relations, in the flesh, are guilty of no blasphemy when they say "he is beside himself," and that he bestows, on the dreams of an heated imagination, all the weight and reality of revelations and mysteries.

Observe now, to what unbelief conducts. Overturn the foundation, which is the Lord Jesus, eternal Son of the living God, and the whole edifice tumbles in pieces: take away the sublime mystery of piety, and the Christian religion is but a dream: deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, and you cut off, from the doctrine of Christians, all the merit of faith, all the consolation of hope, all the motives of charity. With what zeal also, did not the first disciples of the gospel oppose those impious men who, from that time, ventured to attack the glory of their Master's divinity? They well knew that it was striking at the heart of their religion; that it was ravishing from them the only alleviation of their persecutions and sufferings, all confidence in the promises to come, and all the dignity and grandeur of their pretensions; and that, this principle once overthrown, the whole religion dissipated in smoke, and became only a human doctrine and the sect of a mortal man, who, like other chiefs, left nothing but his name to his disciples.

The pagans, likewise, themselves reproached the Christians with rendering divine honours to their Christ. Pliny, a Roman proconsul, celebrated for his works,

giving an account to the emperor Trajan of their morals and doctrine; after being forced to confess that the Christians were pious, innocent, and upright men, and that they assembled before the rising of the sun, not to concert the commission of crimes, or to disturb the peace of the empire, but to live in piety and righteousness, to detest frauds, adulteries, and even the coveting of the wealth of others; only reproaches them with chaunting hymns in honour of their Christ, and of rendering to him the same homages as to a god. Now, if these first believers had not rendered divine honours to Jesus Christ, they would have justified themselves against that calumny; they would have rejected that scandal from their religion, almost the only one which shocked the zeal of the Jews and the wisdom of the Gentiles: they would openly have said: We do not worship Jesus Christ; for we know better than to transfer to a creature, that honour and worship which are due to God alone. Nevertheless, they make no reply to this accusation. Their apologists refute all the other calumnies with which the pagans endeavoured to blacken their doctrine; they clear up and overthrow the slightest accusations; and their apologies, addressed to the senate, attract to them even the admiration of Rome, and impose silence on their enemies. And yet when accused of idolatry towards Jesus Christ, which should be the most crying and the most horrible of accusations; when reproached with worshipping a crucified person, a circumstance the most likely to discredit them, and which ought indeed to have been most grievous to men so holy, so positive against idolatry, and so jealous of the glory of God, they are totally silent; and, far from defending themselves, they even justify the accusation by their silence:

What do I say, by their silence? They authorize it by their language, in professing to suffer for his name, in dying for him, in confessing him before tyrants, in joyfully expiring upon gibbets, in the sweet expectation of going to enjoy him, and of receiving, in his bosom, a more immortal life than that which they had lost for his glory. They suffered martyrdom rather than bend to the statue of the Cesars, rather than allow their pagan friends, through a feeling of human compassion, and in order to save them from torture, falsely to attest, before the magistrates, that they had offered incense to the idols; and they would have submitted to the accusation of paying divine honours to Jesus Christ, without any attempt to destroy the imputation? Yes! they would have proclaimed the contrary from the house tops; they would have exposed themselves even to death, rather than to have given room to so hateful and so execrable a suspicion. What can unbelief oppose to this? And, if it be an error to equal Jesus Christ to God, it is an error which has been born with the church, and upon which the whole structure hath been reared; which has formed so many martyrs, and converted the whole universe.

But what fruit, my brethren, are we to draw from this discourse? That Jesus Christ is the great object of Christian piety. Scarcely, however, do we know Jesus Christ: we never consider that all the other practices of piety, are, as I may say, arbitrary; but, that this is the ground-work of faith and of salvation; that this is pure and sincere piety; that, continually to meditate upon Jesus Christ, to have recourse to him, to nourish ourselves with his doctrine, to enter into the spirit of his mysteries, to study his actions, to count solely upon the merit of his blood and of his sa-

crifice, is the only true knowledge, and the most essential duty of the believer. Remember then, my brethren, that piety towards Jesus Christ is the cordial spirit of the Christian religion; that nothing is solid but what you shall build upon that foundation; and that the principal homage which he expects of you is, that you become like him, and that his life be the model of your own, in order that, through your resemblance to him, you may be included in the number of those who shall be partakers of his glory.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

JOHN xi. 34.

Come and see.

THE most hardened sinner could never have the courage to submit to his frightful situation, were he able to see and to know himself such as he is. A man grown old in guilt, is only supportable to himself, because the same passion, from which all his miseries spring, conceals them from him, and because his disorder is, at the same time, both the weapon which inflicts the wound, and the fatal bandage which hides it from the eyes of the patient.

In order therefore to lay the sinner open to himself during this time of penitence,* the church almost continually displays to us, under various images, the deplorable state of him who has grown old in iniquity: at one time under the figure of a paralytic young man; that is, to mark to us the insensibility and fatal ease which always follow habitual guilt: at another time,

* This Sermon was preached during Lent.

under the symbol of a prodigal reduced to feed with the vilest animals; and, under these traits, it wishes to make us feel his abasement and his infamy: again, under the image of a person born blind, in order to paint to us the extent and the horror of his blindness: and, lastly, under the parable of a deaf and dumb person possessed with a devil, in order to figure to us more vividly, the subjection under which habitual guilt holds all the powers of an unfortunate soul.

To-day, in order as it were, to assemble all these traits in a single image, still more terrible and striking, the church holds out to us the example of Lazarus in the tomb, dead for four days, emitting stench and infection, bound hand and foot, his face covered with a napkin, and exciting only horror even in those whom affection and blood had most closely united to him in life.

Come then and see, my dear brethren, who have lived for so many years past, under the shameful yoke of dissipation, and who are insensible to the misery of your situation. Approach this tomb, which the voice of Jesus Christ is now to open before your eyes; and, in that spectacle of infection and putrefaction, behold the true picture of your soul. You fly to profane spectacles, in order to see your passions represented under pleasing and deceitful colours: approach, and see them expressed here such as they are: come, and, in that infectious and corrupt carcass, behold what you are in the sight of God, and how much your situation is worthy of your tears. In the language of the gospel, "Come and see."

But, lest in exposing only the horrible situation of one who lives a disorderly life, I should trouble and discourage, without holding out to him a hand in order

to assist him in quitting that abyss; and in order that I may omit nothing due to my subject, I shall divide it into three parts: in the first, you will see how shocking and deplorable is the situation of one who lives in habitual irregularity; in the second, I shall shew you the means by which he may quit it; and, in the third, I shall explain what are the motives which determine Jesus Christ to operate the miracle of his resurrection and deliverance. O my God! let thine all-powerful voice be now heard by those unfortunate souls who sleep in the darkness and shadow of death; command these withered bones once more to be animated, and to recover that light and that life of grace which they have lost.

PART I. Three principal circumstances are observable in the deplorable spectacle which Lazarus, dead and buried, offers to our eyes. In the first place, Having already become a mass of worms and corruption, he spreads infection and stench: from this you may see the profound corruption of a soul in habitual sin. *2dly*, A black veil covers his eyes and face: this may be compared to the fatal blindness of a soul in habitual sin. *Lastly*, He appears in the tomb bound hand and foot: and from this you may judge of the melancholy subjection of a soul in habitual sin. Now, it is that profound corruption, that fatal blindness, and that melancholy state of slavery, typified in the spectacle of Lazarus, dead and buried, which form an exact resemblance of the horror and wretchedness of a soul long dead in the eyes of God.

In the first place, There is not a more natural image of a soul grown old in iniquity, than that of a carcass already a prey to worms and putrefaction. Thus the holy books every where represent the state of sin un-

der the idea of a shocking death; and it seems as if the Spirit of God had found that melancholy image the best calculated to give us, at least, a glimpse of all the deformity of a soul in which sin dwells.

Now, two effects are produced on the body by death: it deprives it of life; and it afterwards alters all its features, and corrupts all its members. It deprives it of life; and in the same manner it is that sin begins to disfigure the beauty of the soul. For, God is the life of our souls, the light of our minds, and the spring, as I may say, of our hearts. Our righteousness, our wisdom, and our truth, are only the union of a righteous, wise, and true God with our soul: all our virtues are only the different influences of his Spirit which dwells within us; it is he who exciteth our good desires, who formeth our holy thoughts, who produceth our pure lights, who createth our righteous propensities; insomuch that all the spiritual and supernatural life of our soul is only, as the apostle expresses it, the life of God within us.

Now, by a single act of sin that life ceases, that light is extinguished, that spirit is withdrawn, all these springs are suspended. Thus the soul, without God, is a soul without life, without motion, without light, without truth, without righteousness, and without charity; it is no more than a chaos, or a corpse: its life is only an imaginary and chimerical life; and, like those inanimate substances which are set in motion by a foreign influence, it seems to live and to act; but "it is "dead while it liveth."

Behold the first degree of death, which every sin that separates a soul from God introduces into it; but habitual sin, like inveterate death, goes further. Thus, Lazarus is not only without life in the tomb, but, hav-

ing been there for four days, the corruption of his body begins to spread infection. For although the first sin, which causes the loss of grace, leave us, in the eyes of God, without life and without motion; yet we may say, that certain impressions of the Holy Spirit, certain seeds of spiritual life, certain means of recovering the grace lost, still remain to us. Faith is not yet extinguished; the feelings of virtue are not yet effaced; a sense of the truths of salvation is not yet lost: we become, to be sure, as a corpse; but, life being only just withdrawn, we still preserve certain marks of warmth, which seem to spring from some remnant of life. But, in proportion as the soul remains in death, and perseveres in guilt, grace is withdrawn, every thing decays, every thing changes, every thing becomes corrupt, and corruption becomes universal.

I say universal; yes, my brethren, every thing changes, and corrupts in the soul, through a continuance of disorder; the gifts of nature, gentleness, rectitude, humanity, modesty, the talents even of the mind, the blessings of grace, the sentiments of religion, the feelings of conscience, the terrors of faith, and even faith itself; corruption penetrates every where, and changes, into a spectacle of putrefaction and horror, both the gifts of heaven and the blessings of the earth: nothing remains in its original situation; the loveliest features are become the most hideous and undistinguishable, as the charms of wit become the seasoning of debauchery and the passions; feelings of religion are changed into free-thinking; superiority of knowledge into pride, and a vain and shocking philosophy; nobility of mind is exchanged for a boundless ambition; generosity and tenderness of heart become an easy submission to the sway of impure and profane passions; the prin-

ciples of glory and honour, handed down to us with the blood of our ancestors, a vain ostentation, and the source of hatred and animosities; our rank and elevation, the cause of envy and mean jealousies; and lastly, our riches and our prosperity, the fatal instruments of crime.

But the corruption is not confined to the sinner alone; a dead body cannot be long concealed without the smell of death being spread around; it is impossible to live long in debauchery without the odour of a bad life making itself felt. In vain is every precaution employed to conceal the ignominy of a disorderly life; in vain is the sepulchre, full of putrefaction and infection, externally whitened and embellished, the stench spreads; guilt, sooner or later, betrays itself; a black and poisonous smoke always proceeds from that profane fire which, with so much care, was concealed. A disorderly life betrays itself in a thousand ways; the public, at last undeceived, opens its eyes, and the more the character of the sinner becomes known, the more does he discover himself; he becomes accustomed to his shame; he becomes weary of constraint and decency; that guilt which is only to be purchased with caution and circumspection, appears too dear; he unmasks himself; he throws off that remnant of restraint and modesty which made him cautious of the eyes of men; he begins to riot in disorder, without precaution or care; and then, servants, friends, connexions, the city and country, all feel the infection of his irregularities and example. Our rank and elevation, serve only to render more striking and more durable the scandal of our debaucheries; in a thousand places our excesses serve as a model: the view of our manners perhaps strengthens, in secret, consciences which guilt still ren-

dered uneasy; men perhaps even cite us, and make use of our example in seducing innocence, and in conquering a still timorous modesty: and, even after our death, the fame of our debaucheries shall stain the history of men; shall perhaps embellish lascivious tales; and, long after our day, in ages yet to come, the remembrance of our crimes shall still be an occasion and a source of guilt.

Lastly, although it is somewhat out of place to mention it here, the corruption which habitual guilt sheds through the whole interior of the sinner is so universal, that even his body is infected; debauchery leaves the shameful marks of his irregularities on his flesh: the infection of his soul often extends even to a body which he has made subservient to ignominy. He says, beforehand, to corruption, like Job, "thou art my father; "and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister:" and the corruption of his body is a shocking picture of that of his soul.

Great God! can I then flatter myself that thou wilt yet cast upon me some looks of compassion! Wilt thou not groan at the sight of that mass of crimes and putrefaction which my soul presents to thine eyes, as thou now groanest over the tomb of Lazarus? Ah! turn thine holy eyes from the spectacle of my profound wretchedness; but, let me no more turn away from it myself, and let me be enabled to view myself with all that horror which my situation deserves: tear asunder the veil which hides me from myself; my evils shall, in part, be done away from the moment that I shall be able to see and to know them.

And behold the second deplorable feature in the situation of Lazarus: a mourning cloth covered his face, which may be compared to the profound blind-

ness which forms an additional feature of habitual sin.

I confess that every sin is an error which makes us mistake evil for good; it is a false judgment which makes us seek, in the creature, that ease, grandeur, and independence which we can find in the Creator alone; and, like a mist, hides order, truth, and righteousness from our eyes, and, in their place, substitutes vain phantoms. Nevertheless, a first falling off from God does not altogether extinguish our lights; nor is it always productive of total darkness. It is true that the spirit of God, the source of all light, retires, and no longer dwells within us; but some traces of light are still left in the soul: thus, though the sun be already withdrawn from our hemisphere, yet certain rays of his light still tinge the sky, and form, as it were, an imperfect day; it is only in proportion as he sinks, that the darkness of night prevails. In the same manner, in proportion as sin degenerates into habit, the light of God retires, darkness gains ground, and the profound night of total blindness at last arrives.

Then every thing becomes an occasion of error to the criminal soul; every thing changes its aspect to his eyes; the most shameful passions appear only as weaknesses; the most criminal attachments as sympathies brought with us into the world and inherent to our hearts; the excesses of the table he considers only as the innocent pleasures of society; revenge as a just sense of injury; licentiousness and impious conversations as lively and agreeable sallies; the blackest defamation as a customary language which none but weak and timid minds can scruple to use; the laws of the church as old-fashioned customs; the severity of God's judgments as absurd declamations, which equal-

ly disgrace his goodness and mercy; death in sin, the inevitable consequence of a criminal life, as mere predictions, in which there is more of zeal than of truth, and refuted by the confidence which a return to God, previous to that last moment, promises to us; lastly, heaven, earth, hell, all creatures, religion, crimes, virtues, good and evil, things present and to come, all change their aspect to the eyes of a being who lives in habitual guilt; all shew themselves under false appearances; his whole life is passed in delusion and a continued error. Alas! could you tear away the fatal veil which covers your eyes, like those of Lazarus, and behold yourself, like him, buried in darkness, covered with putrefaction, and spreading around infection and the smell of death! But now, says our Saviour, all these things are hid from your eyes; you see in yourself only the embellishments and the pompous externals of the fatal tomb in which you drag on in sin; your rank, your birth, your talents, your dignities, and your titles, that is to say, the trophies and the ornaments which the vanity of men has there raised up; but, remove the stone which covers that place of horror; look within, judge not of yourself from these pompous externals, which serve only to embellish your corpse; see what, in the eyes of God, you are; and, if the corruption and the profound blindness of your soul touch you not, let its slavery at least rouse and recall you to yourself.

This was the last circumstance in the situation of Lazarus dead and buried; he was bound hand and foot: and thus may you behold the wretched slavery of a soul long under the dominion of sin.

Yes, my brethren, in vain does the world decry a Christian life as a life of subjection and slavery; the

reign of righteousness is a reign of liberty; the soul, faithful and submissive to God, becomes master over all creatures; the just man is above all, because he is unconnected with all; he is master of the world, because he despises the world; he is dependent neither on his masters, because he only serves them for God; nor on his friends, because he only loves them according to the order of charity and of righteousness; nor on his inferiors, because he exacts from them no iniquitous compliance; nor on his fortune, because he rather dreads it; nor on the judgments of men, because he dreads those of God alone; nor on events, because he considers them all as in the order of providence; nor even on his passions, because the charity which is within him is their rule and measure. The just man alone, then, enjoys a perfect liberty: superior to the world, to himself, to all creatures, to all events, he begins, even in this life, to reign with Jesus Christ; all is below him while he is himself inferior to God alone.

But the sinner, who seems to live without either rule or restraint, is, however, a vile slave; he is dependent on all, on his body, on his propensities, on his caprices, on his passions, on his fortune, on his masters, on his friends, on his enemies, on his rivals, on all surrounding beings; they are so many gods to which love or fear subject him; so many idols which multiply his slavery, while he thinks himself more free by casting off that obedience which he owes to God alone; he multiplies his masters, by refusing submission to him alone who renders free those who serve him, and who gives to his servants dominion over the world, and over every thing which the world contains.

You often complain, my dear hearer, of the hardships of virtue; you dread a Christian life, as a life of subjection and sorrow: but what in it could you find so gloomy as you experience in debauchery? Alas! If you durst complain of the bitterness and of the tyranny of the passions; if you durst confess the troubles, the feelings of disgust, the frenzies, the anxieties of your soul; if you were candid with respect to the gloomy transactions of your heart, there is no lot but what would appear preferable to your own; but you disguise the inquietudes of guilt which you feel; and you exaggerate the hardships of virtue which you have never known. In order, however, to hold out to you an assisting hand, let us continue the history of our gospel, and observe, in the resurrection of Lazarus, what are the means offered to you, by the goodness of God, of quitting so deplorable a situation.

PART II. The power of God, says the apostle, is not less conspicuous in the conversion of sinners than in raising up the dead; and the same supernatural power which wrought upon Jesus Christ to deliver him from the tomb, ought to operate upon the soul long dead in sin, in order to recall it to the life of grace. I find there is only this difference, that the almighty voice of God meets no resistance from the body which he revives and recalls to life; on the contrary, the soul, dead and corrupted, as I may say, through the long duration of guilt, seems to retain a remnant of strength and motion only to oppose that powerful voice which is heard even in the abyss in which it is plunged, for the purpose of restoring it to light and life. Nevertheless, however difficult may be the conversion of a soul of this description, and however rare such examples may be, the Spirit of God, in order to

teach us never to despair of divine mercy, when we sincerely wish to quit the ways of iniquity, points out to us, in the resurrection of Lazarus, the means of accomplishing it.

The first step is, confidence in Jesus Christ: 'Lord,' said Martha, the sister of Lazarus, 'if thou hadst been 'here, my brother had not died; but I know that, even 'now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give 'it thee.' 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said Jesus unto her; 'believest thou this?' 'Yea, Lord,' said she, 'I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son 'of God, which should come into the world.' It is through this that the miracle of raising up Lazarus begins, through a perfect confidence, namely, that Jesus Christ is able to deliver him from death and corruption.

For, my brethren, the delusion continually employed by Satan, in order to render our desires of conversion unavailing, and to counteract their progress, is that of despondency and mistrust; he paints in vivid colours to our imagination the horrors of an entire life of guilt: he says to us, in secret, what the sisters of Lazarus say to Jesus Christ, though in a different sense; that we ought, at a much earlier period, to have checked our career; that it is now impossible, when so far advanced, to return; that the time for attempting a change is now past; and that the virulency and age of our wounds leave no resource. Upon this we abandon ourselves to languor and indolence; and, after having incensed the righteousness of God through our debaucheries, we insult his mercy through the excess of our mistrust.

I confess that a soul long dead in sin, must suffer much in returning to God; that it is difficult, after so

many years of dissipation, to form to one's self a new heart and new inclinations; and that it is even fit, that the obstacles, the sufferings, and the difficulties, which always attend the conversion of souls of that description, should make great sinners feel how dreadful it is to have been almost a whole life-time removed from God.

But I say, that, from the moment a truly contrite soul wishes to return to him, his wounds, however virulent or old, ought no longer to alarm his confidence: I say, that his wretchedness ought to increase his compunction, but not his despondency: I say, that the first step of his penitence ought to be an adoration of Jesus Christ as the resurrection and the life; a secret confidence that our wants are always less than his mercies; and a firm persuasion that the blood of Jesus Christ is more powerful in washing out our stains than our corruption can be in contracting them: I say, that, the fewer resources of strength a criminal soul may find in himself, the more ought he to expect from him who taketh delight in rearing up the work of grace upon the nothingness of nature; and that the more he is inwardly opposed to grace, the more does he, in one sense, become an object worthy of divine power and mercy; for God wisheth that all good shall evidently appear as coming from above, and that man shall attribute nothing to himself.

And in effect, my dear hearer, whatever may be the horror of your past crimes, the Lord will not long refuse you grace, from the moment that he hath inspired you with the desire and the resolution of asking it. It is written in the book of Judges, that the father of Samson, terrified by the apparition of the angel of the Lord, who, after announcing to him the birth of a son,

commanded him to offer up a sacrifice, and then, like a devouring fire, consumed the victim and the pile, and vanished from his sight; that, terrified, I say, at the spectacle, he was convinced that both himself and his wife were to be struck with death because they had seen the Lord. But his wife, holy and enlightened, condemned his mistrust. If the Lord, said she to him, wished to destroy us, he would not have made fire from heaven to descend on our sacrifice; he would not have accepted it from our hands; he would not have discovered to us his secrets and his wonders, and what we had hitherto been ignorant of.

And in the same manner do I now answer you. You believe your death and your destruction to be inevitable; the state of your conscience discourages you; in vain do sparks of grace and of light fall upon your heart: in vain do they touch you, solicit you, and almost gain the point of consuming the sacrifice of your passions; you persuade yourself that you are lost beyond resource. But, if the Lord wished to abandon and to destroy you, he would not make fire from heaven to descend upon your heart; he would not light up within you, holy desires and sentiments of penitence: if he wished to let you die in the blindness of your passions, he would not manifest to you the truths of salvation; he would not open your eyes on those miseries to come, which you prepare for yourself. Besides, how do you know if Jesus Christ has not permitted your falling into such a deplorable state, for the purpose of making the miracle of your conversion an incitement to the conversion of your brethren? How do you know if his mercy has not rendered your passions so notorious, in order that thousands of sinners, witnesses of your errors, may

despair not of conversion, and be inflamed at the sight of your penitence? How do you know if your crimes, and even your bad example, have not entered into the designs of God's goodness with regard to your brethren; and if your situation, which seems hopeless, like that of Lazarus, is not rather an occasion of manifesting God's glory, than a presage of death to you?

When grace recalls a common sinner, the fruit of his conversion is limited to himself; but, when it singles out a great sinner, a Lazarus, long dead and corrupted; ah! the designs of its mercy are then much more extensive: in one change it prepares a thousand to come: it raises up a thousand chosen out of one: and the crimes of one sinner become the seed of a thousand just. You give way to despondency in feeling the extremity of your wretchedness: but it is perhaps that very extremity which draws you nearer to the happy moment of your conversion, and which the goodness of God has reserved for you, that you may be a public monument of the excess of his mercies towards the greatest sinners. Only believe, as Jesus Christ said to the sisters of Lazarus, and you shall see the glory of God; you shall see your relations, your friends, your inferiors, and even the accomplices of your debaucheries, become imitators of your penitence; you shall see the most hopeless souls sighing after the happiness of your new life, and the world itself forced to render glory to God, and, while recalling your past errors, compelled to admire the prodigy of your present lot. Draw even from your wretchedness itself, new motives of confidence: bless, in anticipation, the merciful wisdom of that Being, who, even from your passions, shall know how to extract advantages to his glory; every thing co-operates towards the salvation of his chosen,

and he permitteth great excesses only in order to operate great mercies. God ever wisheth the salvation of his creature; and, from the moment that we form a wish of returning to him, our only dread ought to be, not that his justice may reject us, but lest our intention be not sincere.

And the surest proof of our sincerity is the absenting ourselves from every occasion which may place an obstacle to our resurrection and our deliverance; such an obstacle, was the stone which shut up the mouth of Lazarus's tomb, and which Jesus Christ orders to be removed before he begins to effect the miracle of his resurrection. Remove then the stone, and you will take the second step in the great business of conversion.

In effect, every day shews us sinners, who, tired of disorder, wish to return to God, but who cannot prevail upon themselves to quit those objects, those places, those situations, and those temptations, which have been the cause of their removal from him: they vainly persuade themselves that they shall be able to extinguish their passions, to terminate a disorderly life, in a word, to rise from the dead, without removing the stone; they even make some efforts; they address themselves to men of God; they adopt measures for a change; but, they are measures which, as they do not remove the dangers, forward not, in the smallest degree, their safety; and thus their whole life passes sorrowfully away in detesting their chains, and in the utter inability of breaking them asunder.

Whence comes this, my brethren? It is because the passions begin to weaken only after the removal of the objects which have lighted them up; it is absurd to suppose that the heart can change while every thing around us continues, with regard to us, the same; you

would become chaste, yet you live in the midst of the dangers, the connexions, the familiarities, and the pleasures, which have a thousand times corrupted your heart; you would wish to reflect seriously on your eternity, and to place some interval between life and death, yet you are unwilling to place any between death and those debaucheries which prevent you from reflecting on your salvation: in the midst of agitations, pleasures, trifles, and worldly expectations, from which, on no account, will you abate, you expect that the inclination and relish for a Christian life will come to you unsought-for: you wish your heart to form new propensities, while surrounded by every thing which nourishes and fortifies the old, and to relume the lamp of faith and grace in the midst of winds and tempests; that lamp which, even in the sanctuary, is so often extinguished through want of oil and nourishment, and, to lukewarm and retired souls, converts even the safety of their retreat into a source of danger.

Will you say, after this, that good-will is not wanting, but that the moment is not yet come? How, indeed, should it come in the midst of every thing that repels it? Of what importance is that good-will, shut up within you, which has never any consequence, which never leads to any thing real, and never seriously adopts a single measure towards a change? You say in plain terms, that you would wish to change, could it be done for nothing; that you would wish to work out your salvation by the same conduct which occasions your destruction; that you would wish the same manners which have separated your heart from God to bring you to him again; and that what has hitherto been the cause of your ruin, should itself become the way and the means of your salvation. Begin by re-

moving the temptations which so often have been, and still continue to be, the stumbling block of your innocence; remove the stone which shuts up the entry of grace to your soul; and after that you shall be entitled to ask of God the completion of his work in you. Then, separated from those objects which nourished iniquitous passions within you, you shall have it in your power to say to him, It is thy part now, O my God! to change my heart; to thee have I sacrificed every attachment which might still fetter it; I have removed all the rocks upon which my weakness might still have split; as much as in me lay, I have changed the outward man; thou alone, O Lord, canst change the heart; it depends upon thee now to complete what yet remains to be done, to break the invisible chains, to overcome all internal obstacles, and to triumph wholly over my corruption: I have removed the fatal stone which prevented me from hearing thy voice; let it now resound, even through the abyss in which I am still buried; command me to depart from this fatal tomb, this place of infection and putrefaction; but command me with that almighty word which makes itself to be heard even by the dead, and is to them a word of resurrection and life; give me in charge to thy disciples, to be unloosed from those chains which hold captive all the powers of my soul; and let the ministry of thy church put the last seal on my resurrection and my deliverance.

And behold, my brethren, the last step of conversion. Immediately, on the removal of the stone, our Saviour cries, with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" Lazarus comes forth, still bound hand and foot, and Jesus Christ remits him to his disciples to be unloosed.

Observe here that Jesus Christ doth not order his

disciples to disengage Lazarus till after he had entirely quitted the tomb. We must manifest ourselves to the church, says St. Bernard, before we can, through its ministry, receive the blessing of our deliverance. "Lazarus, come forth;" that is to say, continues that father, how long wilt thou remain concealed and buried inwardly in thy conscience? How long wilt thou conceal thine iniquity within thy breast?

You undoubtedly are not ignorant, my brethren, that remission of our sins is only granted through the ministry of the church, and that it is necessary to lay open and present our bonds to the piety of the ministers, who alone have authority to bind and to unbind on the earth; upon this point you require no instruction. But, I say, that, in order to make our conversion solid and durable, we must, like Lazarus, shew ourselves quite out of the tomb. I am not speaking of an ordinary confession; an hardened sinner ought to go back even to his infancy; even to the birth of his passions; even to the earliest periods of his life, which have been the commencement of his crimes. Neither doubts nor obscurities should longer be left in the conscience, nor clouds be suffered to pass over the youthful manners, under pretence that they have already been revealed; a general manifestation is required, and whatever may hitherto have been done must be reckoned as nothing; confession and partaking of the sacrament during a disorderly and worldly life, ought even to be ranked among our crimes; the conscience must be considered as a chaos, into which no light has, as yet, penetrated, and over which all our past acts of fictitious penitence have spread only additional darkness.

For, alàs! my brethren, a contrite person, after re-

turning from the errors of the world and the passions, ought to presume, that, as he has lived to that period in criminal habits and propensities, a participation of the communion was, in that state, only a profanation and a crime.

Because, in the *first* place, having never felt real contrition for his errors, nor, consequently, any sincere desire to purge himself of them, the remedies of the church, far from having purified, have only completed his foulness, and rendered his disease more incurable.

2dly, Because he has never been known to himself; and, consequently, could never make himself known to the tribunal of his conscience. For, alas! the world, in the midst of which he has always lived, and conformably to which he has ever thought and acted; the world, I say, believing its own maxims and manner of thinking reasonable and wise, cannot sufficiently know the holiness of the gospel, the obligations of faith, and the extent of duties, to be qualified to enter into the detail of those transgressions which faith condemns?

3dly, and *lastly*, Because, even admitting he should have known all his wretchedness, never having had any real compunction, he has never been qualified to make it known; for nothing but heartfelt sorrow can explain itself as it ought, or truly represent those evils which it feels and abhors; it must be a feeling heart that can make itself understood with respect to the wounds and the sufferings of the heart itself. A sinner full of profane passion, expresses it much more eloquently, and with more animation; nothing is left unsaid of the foolish and deplorable sufferings he endures; he enters into all the windings of his heart, his jealousies, his fears, and his hopes. As the mind of man, says the apostle, alone knows what passes in man, so

likewise it is only the heart which can know what passes in the heart. Contrition gives eyes to see, and words to express every thing; it has a language which nothing can counterfeit: and in vain may a worldly being, still chained by the heart to all his disorders, accuse himself, he cannot be understood; without any absolute intention of concealing his wounds, he never exposes all their horror, because he neither feels nor is struck with them himself; his words always bear marks of the insensibility of his heart; and it is impossible that he should expose, in all their ugliness, deformities which he knows not, and which he still loves: he ought, therefore, to consider the whole period of his past life as a period of darkness and blindness, during which he has never viewed himself but with the eyes of flesh and blood; never judged but through the opinions of passion and self-love; never accused but in the language of error and impertinence; and never exhibited himself but in a false and imperfect light. It is not enough to have removed the stone from the tomb; the criminal must come forth from it himself, that he may exhibit himself, as I may say, in open day; that he may manifest his whole life; and that, from his earliest years even to the blessed hour of his deliverance, nothing may be concealed from the eyes of the ministers ready to unbind him.

But this step, you say, has difficulties which may be the occasion of creating trouble, embarrassment, and discouragement, in the conscience, and of suspending the resolution of a change of life. What! my brethren, you involve yourselves in endless and arduous discussions, for the purpose of clearing up your temporal concerns; and yet, when it is necessary to establish regularity and serenity in your conscience, and to leave

nothing doubtful in the affair of your eternity, you cry out from the moment, that a few cares and investigations are required! How often do you proclaim, when a decisive step is in agitation which may determine the ruin or preservation of your fortune, that nothing must be neglected, nothing must be left to chance; that one's own eyes must look into every thing; that every thing must be cleared up, every thing fathomed even to the bottom, that you may have nothing afterwards wherewith to reproach yourselves; and ought this maxim, so reasonable when connected with fleeting and frivolous interests, to be less so when applied to the great and only real interest, that of salvation?

Ah! my brethren, how poor are we in faith! What have we, in this life, of more importance than the care of arranging that awful account which we are to render to the eternal Judge, and to the searcher of hearts and of thoughts? What more important than the care of regulating our conscience, of dispelling its darkness, of purifying its stains, of clearing up its eternal interests, of confirming its hopes, of strengthening ourselves as much as the present condition permits, and making ourselves acquainted, as far as in our power, with its situation and its dispositions; so as that we may not make our appearance before God like fools, unknown to ourselves, uncertain of what we are, and of what we must for ever be. Such are the means of conversion marked out to us in the miracle of raising up Lazarus: let us conclude the history of our text, and see what are the motives which determine Jesus Christ to operate it.

Part III. To enter at once into our subject, without losing sight of the order of the gospel; we may observe that the first motive by which our Saviour

seems to be actuated, in the resurrection of Lazarus, is that of drying up the tears, and rewarding the prayers and the piety of his sisters. 'Lord,' said they to him, 'he whom thou lovest, is sick:' such is the motive which often determines Jesus Christ to operate the conversion of a great sinner; the tears and the prayers of those just souls who entreat it.

Yes, my brethren, whether it be that the Lord thereby wish to render virtue more respectable to sinners, by according favours to them only through the mediation of the just: whether it be, that he intend more closely to knit together his members, and to perfect them in unity and in charity, by rendering the ministry of the one, useful and requisite to the other; it is certain, that through the prayers of the good, and in their intercession, the source of conversion of the greatest sinners takes its rise. As all is done for the just in the church, says the apostle, so it may be said, that every thing is done through them; and, as sinners are only endured in it to exercise their virtue, or to animate their vigilance, they are also recalled from their errors only to console their faith, and to reward their troubles and prayers.

To love the righteous is a beginning, then, of righteousness to the greatest sinners; it is a presage of virtue, to respect it in those who practise it; it affords a prospect of conversion to seek the society of the good, to esteem their acquaintance, and to interest them in our salvation; and, even admitting that our heart still groans under iniquitous bonds, and that attachment to the world and to pleasures still separate us from God, yet, from the moment that we begin to love his servants, we accomplish, as it were, the first step in his service. It seems as if our heart already becomes tired

of its passions, from the moment that we take pleasure in the society of those who condemn them; and that a relish for virtue is on the eve of springing up in us, from the moment that we take delight in those whom virtue alone renders amiable.

Besides, the just, instructed by ourselves with regard to our weaknesses, keep them continually present before the Lord; they lament, before him, over those chains which still bind us to the world and to its amusements; they offer up to him those weak aspirations for virtue, which we have intrusted to their charge, in order to induce His goodness to grant more fervent and more efficacious ones; they carry, even to the foot of the throne, those feeble essays towards good which they have noted in us, in order to obtain for us the perfection and plenitude of his mercy. More affected with our evils than with their own wants, they piously forget themselves, in order to snatch from destruction their brethren who are on the point of perishing before their eyes: they alone love us for ourselves, because they alone seek no more than our salvation; the world may furnish sycophants, flatterers, and social companions in dissipation; but virtue alone gives us friends.

And in this part of my discourse, permit me to remind you who now listen to me, you who, perhaps, like Mary, were formerly slaves of the world and the passions, and who, latterly, touched with grace, abide like her, at the feet of the Lord; that, in future, one of the most important duties of your new life is, that of continually asking, like the sister of Lazarus, from Jesus Christ, the resurrection of your brethren, the conversion of those unfortunate souls who have been accomplices in your criminal pleasures, and who still,

under the dominion of death and sin, drag on their heavy chains in the road of error. You ought in the bitterness of your heart, to be constantly saying to Jesus Christ, like the sister of Lazarus: Lord! he whom thou lovest is sick; those souls to whom I have been as a stumbling-block, and who have less offended thee than I, are still, however, in the shadow of death, and in the corruption of sin; and I enjoy a deliverance of which I was more unworthy than they. Alas! Lord, the delight I feel in belonging to thee shall never be perfect while I behold my brethren thus miserably perishing before mine eyes: I shall but imperfectly enjoy the fruit of thy mercies, while thou refusest them to souls, of whose departure from righteousness I have myself been the fatal cause: and I shall never think that my crimes are fully forgiven, while I see them existing in those sinners who have been removed from thee only through my example and my passions.

Not, my brethren, that you ought to place your whole dependence on the prayers of the good, or to expect from them alone, a change of heart and the gift of penitence. For this is a very general mistake, and more especially among those who are high in the world: they suppose that, by respecting virtue, by shewing favour to the good, and by interesting them to solicit our conversion from God, our chains will drop off of themselves without any effort on our part; they comfort themselves upon that remnant of faith and religion which renders virtue in others still dear and respectable to us; they give themselves credit for not having, as yet, reached that point of free-thinking and impiety, so common in the world, which makes virtue the public butt of its censures and ridi-

cule. But, alas! my brethren, it availed nothing to king Jehu that he had publicly rendered honour to the holy man Jehonadab; his vices still subsisted, notwithstanding the respect he had for the man of God. It availed nothing to Herod that he had honoured the piety of John the Baptist, and that he had even loved the holy freedom of his discourses: the deference which he had for the Precursor left him still in all the excess of his criminal passion. The honours which we pay to virtue, attract assistance to our weakness, but they do not justify our errors: the prayers of the good, induce the Lord to pay more attention to our wants, but they do not render him more indulgent to our crimes: they obtain for us a victory over the passions which we begin to detest, but not over those which we still love, and which we still continue to cherish: in a word, they assist our good desires; but they do not authorise our impenitence.

The miracle of raising up Lazarus teaches the just then, to solicit the conversion of their brethren; but the conversion and deliverance of their brethren likewise serve to animate their lukewarmness and slothfulness. The second motive, therefore, which actuated Jesus Christ, was a wish to arouse the dormant faith of his disciples, by that uncommon miracle.

Such is the fruit which Jesus Christ continually expects from the miracles of his grace: he performs prodigies of conversion before the eyes of those who have long walked in his ways, in order, by the fervour and the zeal of those newly risen from the dead, to confound your lukewarmness and indolence. Yes, my brethren, nothing is more calculated to cover us with confusion, and to make us tremble over the infidelities which we still mingle with a cold and languishing

piety, than the sight of a soul buried, but an instant ago, in the corruption of death and sin, and whose errors had perhaps inflated the vanity of our zeal, and served as a butt to the malignity of our censures; nothing I say, is calculated to produce a greater effect, than the sight, of such a being, vivified, a moment after, by grace, freed from his chains, and boldly walking in the ways of God, more eager after mortification than formerly after pleasure; more removed from the world and its amusements than apparently he was once attached; denying himself the most innocent recreations; allowing scarcely any bounds to the vivacity and transports of his penitence; and every day making rapid advances in piety: while we, after many years of piety, alas! still languish in the beginning of that holy career; we, after so many signal favours received, so many truths known, so many sacraments and other duties of religion attended, we, alas! still hold to the world and to ourselves by a thousand ties; we are yet but in the first rudiments of faith and of a Christian life, and still more distant than at first, from that zeal and that fervour which constitute the whole value and the whole security of a faithful piety.

My brethren, the dreadful prophecy of Jesus Christ is every day fulfilled before our eyes. Publicans and sinners, persons of a scandalous conduct, even according to the ideas of the world, and as distant from the kingdom of God, as the east is from the west, are converted, repent, and surprise the world with the sight of a retired and mortified life, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and, we, perhaps, who are looked upon as children of the kingdom; whose manners present nothing to the eyes of the

world but what is orderly and laudable; who are held out as models of propriety and piety; whom the world canonises, and who exalted ourselves with the reputation and the appearances of piety; alas! we shall perhaps be rejected and confounded with unbelievers, for having always laboured at our salvation with negligence, and having preserved a carnal heart, in the midst even of our pious works.

Thus, my brethren, I beseech you to whom this discourse may be applicable, do not judge of yourselves from the comparison which you inwardly make with those whom the world and the passions hurry away. We may be more righteous than the world, and yet not enough so for Jesus Christ: for the world is so corrupt; the gospel is so little known in it; faith is so weakened; the law and truth so little observed, that what is virtue, with regard to it, may still be a great iniquity in the sight of God.

Rather compare yourselves with those holy penitents who formerly edified the church by the prodigy of their austerities, and whose life, even at this day, appears to us so incredible; compare yourselves with those noble martyrs who gave up their body for the truth, and who, amidst the most cruel torments, were transported with joy in contemplating the holy promises; with those primitive believers who suffered death every day for Jesus Christ, and who, under persecution, loss of property, and of their children, thought themselves still possessed of all, as they had neither lost faith nor the hope of a better life: these are the models by which you ought to measure your piety, in order to find it still deficient, and worldly. Unless you resemble them, it is in vain that you do not resemble the world, you shall perish like it; it is not enough

that you do not imitate the crimes of the worldly; you must also have the virtues of the just.

Lastly, Not only does the goodness of Jesus Christ desire to furnish by this miracle, to his disciples and to the Jewish believers, a fresh motive for believing in him, but his justice likewise supplies a fresh opportunity for obstinacy and incredulity to the unbelieving Israelites: the last circumstance in the text upon which I shall remark. They take measures to destroy him; they wish to put Lazarus himself to death, that so striking a testimony of the power of Jesus Christ may no longer continue among them. They had lamented his death; but scarcely is he recalled to life, when he appears worthy only of their fury and vengeance. Behold the only fruit which the generality of you reap from the miracles of grace; that is to say, from the conversion and the spiritual resurrection of great sinners. Before the mercy of Jesus Christ had cast looks of grace and salvation upon a criminal, and, while he was yet delivered up to the dominion of the passions, and not only dead in sin, but spreading every where around, the infection and the stench of his disorders and example, you seemed touched for his errors and shame; you deplored the misery of his lot; you mingled your tears and regrets with the tears and regrets of his friends and relatives; and the public irregularity of his conduct experienced from you every sorrow and compassion of humanity; but, scarcely hath the grace of Jesus Christ recalled him to life, scarcely does he come forth from the tomb and the abyss of corruption in which he was buried, to render glory to his deliverer, by the holy ardours of a tender and sincere piety, than you become the censors even of his piety: you had appeared touched for the excess

of his vices, and you publicly deride the excess of his pretended piety. You had blamed his warm pursuits after pleasure, and you condemn the fervour of his love for God. Be consistent, therefore, with yourselves, and decide in favour either of the just or of the sinner.

Yes, my brethren, if the happiness of a soul, who, before your eyes, returns from his errors, excite not your envy; if the contrition of a sinner, who was formerly the companion perhaps of your pleasures and excesses, leave you all your indifference with regard to salvation. Ah! insult not at least his good fortune; despise not in him the gift of God; derive not, even from the miracles of grace, so proper to open your eyes, a fresh motive of blindness and unbelief; and do not thus change the blessings of God to your brethren, into a dreadful judgment of justice against you.

In reading the history of our gospel, you are sometimes astonished that the obstinacy and blindness of the Jews should be able to resist the most striking miracles of Jesus Christ; you do not comprehend how the raising up of the dead, the curing of persons born blind, and so many other wonders wrought before their eyes, did not force them to acknowledge the truth of his ministry, and the sanctity of his doctrine: you say, that much less would convince you; that any one of all these miracles would suffice, and that you would immediately yield to the truth.

But, my brethren, you condemn yourselves out of your own mouth; for, (without refuting in this place that absurd manner of speaking, by those great and sublime proofs which religion furnishes against impiety, and which we have elsewhere employed,) candidly speaking, is it not a more arduous and a more astonishing miracle, that a man, delivered up to sin, and to

the most shameful passions, born with every propensity to voluptuousness, pride, revenge, and ambition, and more distant than any one, by the nature of his heart, from the kingdom of God, and from all the maxims of Christian piety; that such a man should renounce all his gratifications, break asunder all his warmest attachments, repress his liveliest passions, change his most rooted inclinations, forget injuries, neglect all attention to the body and to fortune, have no relish but for prayer, retirement, and the practice of the most gloomy and disgusting duties, and hold out to the eyes of the public, in a change and resurrection so palpable, the spectacle of a life so different from the former, that the world, that scepticism itself, shall be forced to render glory to the truth of his change, and no longer know him to be the same; is it not, I say, a more arduous and more astonishing miracle?

Now, does not the mercy of Jesus Christ operate such miracles almost every day before your eyes? Does not his holy word, though in a weak and languishing mouth, still raise up new Lazaruses from the dead? You behold them; you know and appear astonished at them; yet, nevertheless, do they touch you? Do these wonders which, with so much majesty, the finger of God maketh to shine forth, recall you to truth and to the light? Do these changes, a thousand times more miraculous than the raising up of the dead, convince you? Do they bring you nearer to Jesus Christ, or restore to you that faith which you have lost?

Alas! your whole care, like the Jews, is to stand out against, or to weaken their truth. You deny that grace hath any part in the glory of these wonders; you seek to trace their motives in causes altogether worldly; you consider them as delusions and impositions;

you attribute to the artifices of man the most shining operations of the holy Spirit; you insist that such a new life is only a fresh snare to entrap the public credulity, and a new path more securely to attain some worldly purpose. Thus, the works of the almighty power of Jesus Christ harden you; thus, even the wonders of his grace complete your blindness; thus, you make every thing conducive to your destruction: Jesus Christ becomes to you a stumbling-block, when he ought to have been a source of life and salvation. The examples of sinners stain and corrupt you: their penitence revolts and hardens you.

Great God! suffer me then, in order that a life of crime may at last be terminated, to raise my voice to thee out of the depths in which I have, for so many years, languished: the impure chains with which I am bound, attach me so strongly to the bottom of the gulph in which I drag on my gloomy days, that, in spite of all my good desires, I still remain fettered, and almost incapable of any effort towards disengaging myself and returning to thee, O my God, whom I have forsaken. But, Lord, out of the depths in which thou seest me, like another Lazarus, fettered and buried, I have, at least, the voice of the heart, free to send up, even to the foot of the throne, my sorrows, my lamentations, and my tears.

The voice of a repentant sinner is always agreeable, O Lord, to thine ear; it is that voice of Jacob which awakens all thy tenderness, even when it offers to thy sight only the hands of Esau, covered as they are, with blood and crimes.

Thine holy ears, O Lord, have now sufficiently long been turned away from my licentiousness and blasphemy; let them now be attentive to the voice of my sup-

plications; and, let the singularity of the words which I now address to thee, O my God! attract a more favourable attention to my prayer.

I come not here, great God! to excuse my disorders in thy sight, by alleging the occasions which have seduced me, the examples which have led me astray, the misfortune of my engagements, and the nature of my heart and of my weakness; turn away thine eyes, O Lord, from the horrors of my past life; the only possibility of excusing them is, not to behold or to know them: alas! if I am unable myself to support even their view; if my crimes fly from mine own eyes, and if my terrors and my weakness render it absolutely necessary to turn my sight from them, how, O Lord, should they be able to sustain the sanctity of thy looks, if thou search into them with that eye of severity which finds stains in the purest and most laudable life?

But thou, O Lord, art not a God like unto man, to whom it is always difficult to pardon and to forget the injuries of an enemy; goodness and pity dwell in thine eternal bosom; clemency is the first attribute of thy supreme Being; and thou hast no enemies but those who refuse to place their trust in the abundant riches of thy mercy.

Yes, Lord! be the hour what it may when a criminal soul casts himself upon thy mercy; whether in the morning of life or in the decline of age; whether after the errors of youthful manners or after an entire life of dissipation and licentiousness, thou desirest, O God! that their hope in thee be not extinguished; and thou assurest us that the highest point of our crimes is but the lowest degree of thy mercy.

Great God! if thou listen to my desires; if, once more, thou restore to me that life and that light which

I have lost; if thou break asunder my chains of death which still fetter me; if thou stretch out thine hand to withdraw me from the gulf in which I am plunged, ah! never, O Lord, shall I cease to proclaim thine eternal mercies: I will forget the whole world, that I may be occupied only with the wonders of thy grace towards my soul: I will every moment of my life render glory to the God who shall have delivered me: my mouth, for ever shut against vain things, shall with difficulty be able to express all the transports of my love and of my gratitude; and thy creature, who still groans under the dominion of the world and of sin, then restored to his true Lord, shall, henceforth and for ever more, bless his deliverer.

SERMON XXX.

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

LUKE xxi. 27.

Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.

SUCH, my brethren, will be that last spectacle which shall terminate the constant series of revolutions which the world is continually offering to our eyes, and which either amuse us through their novelty, or seduce us by their charms. Such will be the coming of the Son of Man, the day of his revelation, the accomplishment of his kingdom, and the complete redemption of his mystical body. Such will be the day of the manifestation of consciences, that day of misery and despair to one portion of men, and of peace, consolation and ineffable delight to the other; the sweet expectation of the just, the dread of the wicked; the day which is to determine the destiny of all men.

It was the prospect, ever present to their minds, of that terrible day, which rendered the first believers patient under persecution, delighted under suffering, and glorying in opprobrium. It is that which hath

since supported the faith of martyrs, animated the constancy of virgins, and smoothed to the anchorite all the horrors of a desert; it is that which still peoples those religious solitudes, which the piety of our ancestors, has erected as asylums against the contagion of the age.

Even you, my brethren, when the awful solemnity of that great event hath sometimes intruded on your thoughts, have been unable to check feelings of compunction and dread. But these have been only transitory fears; more smiling and more agreeable ideas have speedily effaced them, and recalled to you your former calm. Alas! in the happy days of the church he would have been considered as renouncing faith, who did not long for the day of the Lord. The only consolation of those first disciples of faith was in looking forward to it: and the apostles were obliged even to moderate, on that point, the holy eagerness of believers; and yet, in these days, the church finds itself under the necessity of employing the whole terror of our ministry, in order to recall its remembrance to Christians, and the whole fruit of our sermons is confined to making it dreaded.

I mean not, however, to lay before you in this place, the whole history of that awful event. I wish to confine myself to one of its circumstances, which has always appeared to me the most proper to make an impression on the heart: it is the manifestation of consciences.

This is my whole design. On the earth a sinner never knows himself such as he is, and is only half-known to men; he lives, in general, unknown to himself, through his blindness, and to others, through his dissimulation and cunning. In that great day he will know himself, and will be known. The sinner laid

open to himself: the sinner laid open to all creatures; this is the subject upon which I have resolved to make some simple, and, I trust, edifying reflections.

PART I. "All things are reserved for a future day," says the sage Ecclesiastes: "and no man knoweth "them here below, for all things come alike to all: "there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; "to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to "him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; "as is the good, so is the sinner."

What idea, indeed, should we have of Providence in the government of the universe, were we to judge of his wisdom and justice only from the different lots which he provides on this earth for men? What! ought good and evil to be dispensed on earth, without choice, respect, or discrimination? Should the just man almost always groan under affliction and want, whilst the wicked live surrounded with glory, pleasures, and affluence; and, after fortunes so different, and manners so dissimilar, ought both alike to sink into an eternal oblivion, and the just and avenging God, whom they may afterwards meet, not deign either to weigh their deeds, or to distinguish their merits? Thou, O Lord, art just, and wilt render to each according to his works.

This important point of Christian faith, so consistent even with natural equity, being supposed: I say, that, in that terrible day, when, in the face of the universe, the sinner shall appear before that awful tribunal accompanied by his works, the manifestation of consciences will be the most horrible punishment of the unfaithful soul. A rigorous examination shall, in the first place, make him known to himself: and let us now consider the circumstances of that awful discussion.

I ought, in the first place, to make you observe all the titles with which he will be invested, who shall examine you, and which announce the rigour with which he shall weigh in the balance your deeds and thoughts. You will find him a rigid legislator, jealous of the sanctity of his law, and who will judge you only by it; all the mitigation, all the vain interpretations, which custom or false knowledge had invented, shall vanish; the lustre of the law will dissipate them; the resources with which they had flattered the sinner, will sink into nothing; and the incensed legislator will examine more rigorously the false interpretations which had sullied its purity, than the manifest transgressions which had violated it. You will find him a judge charged with the interests of his Father's glory against the sinner, and established to decide between God and man; and that day will be the day of his zeal for the honour of the divinity, against those who shall not have rendered to him that honour which is his due: you will be judged by a Saviour, who will shew you his wounds to reproach your ingratitude; all that he hath done for you will rise up against you; his blood, the price of your salvation, will loudly demand your destruction; and your contempt of his kindnesses will be numbered among your heaviest crimes: you will be judged by the searcher of hearts, to whose eyes the most hidden councils and the most secret thoughts will all be laid open: lastly, you will be judged by a God of terrible majesty, before whom the heavens shall dissolve, the elements shall be confounded, and all nature overturned; and whose scrutiny, and the terror of whose presence, the sinner shall singly be forced to support.

Now, behold the circumstances of that awful examination. In the first place, It will be the same for all

men: and, as St. Matthew says, before him shall be gathered all nations. The difference of ages, countries, conditions, birth, and temperament, shall no longer be there attended to; and as the gospel, on which you will be judged, is the law of all times and conditions, and holds out the same rules to the prince and to the subject, to the great and to the lowly, to the anchorite and to the man immersed in the affairs of the world, to the believer who lived in the fervour of the primitive times, and to him who hath the misfortune to live in the relaxation of the present age; no distinction will be made in the manner of proceeding on the examination of the guilty. Vain excuses founded on rank and birth, on the dangers of your station, on the manners of the age, on the weakness of temperament, will then be no longer listened to from you; and, with respect to modesty, chastity, ambition, forgiveness of injuries, renouncement of one's self, and mortification of the senses, the just Judge will demand an exact account, equally from the Greek as from the Barbarian; from the poor as from the powerful; from the man of the world as from the solitary; from the prince as from the humblest subject; and *lastly*, from the Christians of these latter times as from the first disciples of the gospel.

Vain judgments of the earth, how shall you then be confounded! And how little shall we then estimate nobility of blood, the glory of ancestry, the blaze of reputation, the distinction of talents, and all those pompous titles with which men endeavour on this earth, to exalt their meanness, and to found so many vain distinctions and privileges, when we see, amid that crowd of guilty, the sovereign confounded with the slave; the great with the meanest of the people; the

learned promiscuously blended with the ignorant and mean; the gods of war, these invincible and far-famed characters who had filled the universe with their name, at the side of the husbandman and labourer. Thou alone, O my God! hast glory, power and immortality; and, all the titles of vanity being destroyed and annihilated with the world, which had invented them, each will appear before thee accompanied solely by his works!

2dly, That examination will be universal; that is to say, it will comprehend all the different ages and circumstances of your life: the errors of childhood, which have escaped your remembrance; the passions of youth, of which almost every moment has been a crime; the ambition and anxieties of manhood; the jealousies and selfishness of a voluptuous old age. How will you be astonished, when retracing the various parts which you have acted on the earth, you shall find yourself every where profane, dissolute, voluptuous, without virtue, without penitence, and without good works; having passed through a diversity of situations merely in order to amass a more abundant treasure of wrath; and having lived in these different states as if all were to die with you!

The variety of events, which succeed each other here below, and divide our life, fix our attention only on the present, and do not permit us to recollect it in the whole, or fully to see what we really are. We never regard ourselves but in that point of view in which our present situation holds us out; the last situation is always the one which leads us to judge of ourselves; a sentiment of salvation, with which God sometimes indulges us, calms us with respect to the insensibility of many years; a day, passed in exercises

of piety, makes us forget a life of crimes; the declaration of our faults, at the tribunal of penitence, effaces them from our remembrance, and they become to us as though they had never been; in a word, of all the different states of our conscience we never see but the present. But, in the presence of the terrible Judge, the whole will be visible at once; the history will be entirely laid open. From the very first feeling formed by your heart, even to its last sigh, all shall be collected before your eyes; all the iniquities, dispersed through the different stages of your life, will then confront you; not an action, not a desire, not a word, not a thought, will there be omitted; for, if our hairs be numbered, judge of our deeds. We shall see pass before us the whole course of our life, which, though annihilated as to us, yet lived in the eyes of God; and we there shall find, not those perishable histories in which our vain actions were to be transmitted to posterity; not those flattering recitals of our military exploits, of those brilliant events which had filled so many volumes, and exhausted so much praise; not those public records in which are set down the nobility of our birth, the antiquity of our origin, the fame of our ancestors, the dignities which have rendered them illustrious, the lustre which we have added to their name, and all the history of human illusion and weakness; this boasted immortality, which it promised us, shall be buried in the ruins and in the wrecks of the universe; but we shall see there the shocking and exact history of our heart, of our mind, and of our imagination; that is to say, that internal and invisible part of our life, equally unknown to ourselves and to the rest of men.

Yes, my brethren: besides the exterior history of

our manners, all of which will be remembered, what will most astonish us is, the secret history of our heart, which will then be wholly laid open to our eyes; of that heart which we have never sounded, and never known; of that heart which continually eluded our search, and under specious names, disguised from us the shame of its passions; of that heart whose elevation, probity, magnanimity, disinterestedness, and natural goodness, we have so much vaunted; which the public error or adulation had beheld in the same light, and had consequently exalted us above other men. The many shameful desires, which were scarcely formed before we endeavoured to conceal them from ourselves; the many absurd projects of fortune and elevation, delusions, to which our seduced heart continually gave itself up; the many secret and mean jealousies which were the invisible principle of all our conduct, yet, which we nevertheless dissembled through pride; the many criminal dispositions which had, a thousand times, induced us ardently to wish, either that the pleasures of the senses were eternal, or that, at least, they should remain unpunished; the many hatreds and animosities, which, unknown to ourselves, had corrupted our heart; the many defiled and vicious intentions, with regard to which we were so ingenious in flattering ourselves; the many projects of iniquity to which opportunity had alone been wanting, and which we reckoned as nothing, because they had never departed from the heart; in a word, that vicissitude of passions which, in succession, had possession of our heart: these shall all be displayed before our eyes. We shall see emerge, says St. Bernard, as from an ambuscade, numberless crimes, of which we could never believe ourselves capable. We shall

be shewn to ourselves; we shall be made to enter into our own heart, where we had never resided: a sudden light shall clear up that abyss: the mystery of iniquity shall be revealed: and we shall see that which of all we knew least, ourselves.

To the examination of the evils we have committed will succeed that of the good which we have failed to do. The endless omissions of which our life has been full, and for which we had never felt even remorse, will be recollected; the many circumstances in which our character engaged us to render glory to truth, and in which we have betrayed it through vile motives of interest, or servility; the many opportunities of doing good, provided for us by the kindness of God, and which we have almost always neglected; so much culpable and voluntary ignorance, in consequence of having always dreaded the light, and even fled from those who could have instructed us; the many events calculated to open our eyes, and which have served only to increase our blindness; so much good, which, through our talents or our example, we might have done, and which we have prevented by our vices; the many souls whose innocence might have been preserved by our bounty, and whom we have left to perish, by refusing to abate from our profusions; the many crimes which might have been prevented in our inferiors or equals by prudent remonstrance and useful advice, and which indolence, meanness, and perhaps more culpable views, have made us suppress; the many days and moments which might have been placed to advantage for Heaven, and which we have spent in idleness and an unworthy effeminacy. And the most dreadful consideration is, that in our own eyes, this was the most innocent part of our

life, offering nothing to our remembrance, as we suppose, but a great void.

What endless regret, then, will the unfaithful soul suffer, in observing such a list of days sacrificed to inutility, and to a world which has passed away; while a single moment, consecrated to a God, faithful to his promises, might have merited the felicity of the holy! How will he lament, in remembering the many acts of meanness and humiliation he has endured for the sake of riches, and of a miserable fortune which could last only for a moment; while a single mortification suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ, would have secured him an immortal crown! What regret must he not feel, when he now finds, that not half the cares and anxieties were required for his salvation, which he has undergone to accomplish his destruction; and that a single day of that long life, wholly devoted to the world, had sufficed for eternity!

To that examination will succeed, in the fourth place, that of the mercies which you have abused; the many holy inspirations either rejected or only partly followed; the many watchful attentions of Providence to your soul rendered unavailing; the many truths, declared through our ministry, which, in many believers, have operated penitence and salvation, but have always been sterile in your heart; the many afflictions and disappointments, which the Lord had provided for you, in order to recall you to him, and of which you have always made so unworthy an use; even the many natural gifts which once were blossoms of virtue, and which you have turned into agents of vice: ah! if the unprofitable servant be cast into utter darkness for having only hidden his talent, with what indulgence can you flatter yourself, you who have re-

ceived so many, and who have always employed them against the glory of that Master who had entrusted them to you?

Here, indeed, it is that the reckoning will be terrible. Jesus Christ will demand from you the price of his blood. You sometimes complain that God doth not enough for you; that he hath brought you into the world weak, and hath given you a temperament of which you are not the master; and that he bestoweth not the necessary grace to enable you to resist the many opportunities which drag you away. Alas! you will then see that your whole life has been a continued abuse of his mercies; you will see that, among so many infidel nations which know him not, you have been privileged, enlightened, called to faith, nourished in the doctrine of truth and the virtue of the sacrament, and incessantly supported by his inspirations and his grace; you will be shocked to see all that God hath done for you, and the little that you have done for him; and your complaints will quickly be changed into an utter confusion, destitute of every resource but in the horrors of your own despair.

Thus far the righteous Judge hath examined you only with respect to those crimes which are especially your own; but how will it be when he shall enter into a reckoning with you, with respect to the sins of others, of which you have been either the occasion or the cause, and which will, consequently, be imputed to you? What a new abyss of misery! All those to whom you have been a subject of scandal and ruin, will be shewn you; all those whom your language, your counsels, your example, your solicitations, or your immodesties, have precipitated, with yourself, into eternal destruction; all those whose weakness

you have seduced, or whose innocence you have corrupted, whose faith you have perverted, or whose virtue you have shaken, whose free-thinking you have authorised, or whose impiety you have strengthened by your persuasions, or by the example of your life. Jesus Christ, to whom they belonged, and who had purchased them with his blood, will demand them at your hands, as a dear heritage, as a precious conquest, which you have unjustly ravished from him; and, if the Lord marked Cain with the sign of reprobation in demanding account from him of the blood of his brother, judge with what sign you shall be marked when you shall be brought to a reckoning for the souls of your brethren!

But this is not all. Were you a public character, and high in authority, what abuses will you not find authorised! What iniquities glanced over! What duties sacrificed, either to your own interests, or to the passions and interests of others! What respect of persons, in opposition to equity and conscience! What iniquitous undertakings counselled! What wars, perhaps, what confusions, what public evils, of which you have either been the author or the infamous agent! You will see that your ambition or your counsels have been as the fatal source of an infinity of miseries, of the calamities of your age, of those evils which are perpetuated, and pass from father to son; and you will be surprised to find that your iniquities have survived yourself, and that, even long after death, you were still culpable, before God, of an infinity of crimes and disorders which took place on the earth. And now it is, my brethren, that you will perceive the danger of public stations, the precipices which surround the throne itself, the temptations of authority, and with

what reason the gospel denominated happy, those who live in the obscurity of a private station; why it was that religion wishes to inspire us with so much horror of ambition, so much indifference towards the grandeurs of the earth, so much contempt for all that is exalted only in the eyes of men, and so frequently recommends to us to love only what we ought for ever to love.

But, exempted perhaps from all these vices which we have just been mentioning, and attached, for a long time past, to the duties of a Christian life, you presume that this terrible examination will either not affect you, or, at any rate, that you will appear there with more confidence than the criminal soul. Undoubtedly, my dear hearer, that will be the day of triumph and glory for the just; the day which will justify these pretended excesses of retirement, mortification, modesty, and delicacy of conscience, which had furnished to the world so many subjects of censure and profane derision: the just shall, no doubt, appear before that awful tribunal with more confidence than sinners; but they will also appear there, and even their righteousness shall be judged: your virtues, your holy works, will be submitted to that rigorous examination. The world, which often refuses the praises due to the truest virtue, too often likewise grants them to the mere appearance of virtue: there are even too many righteous who deceive themselves, and who are indebted, for that name and that reputation, merely to the public error. Thus, "it is not only Tyre and Sidon that I shall visit in the "day of my wrath," saith the Lord; that is to say, those sinners whom their crimes seemed to confound with the unbelievers and the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon: "I shall carry the light of my judgments even "to Jerusalem;" that is to say, I will examine, I will

search into, I will fathom the motives of those holy works which seem to equal you with the most faithful of the holy Jerusalem.

I will trace, even to the source, the motive of that conversion which made so much noise in the world; and it shall be seen whether I find not its origin in some secret disgust, in the declension of youth and fortune, in private views of favour and preferment, rather than in the detestation of sin and love of righteousness.

I will balance those liberalities poured out on the bosom of the poor, those compassionate visits, that zeal for pious undertakings, and that protection granted to my servants, with the complaisance, the desire of esteem, the ostentation, and the worldly views which have infected them; and, in my sight, they shall perhaps appear to be rather the fruits of pride, than the consequences of grace and the work of my spirit.

I will recollect that train of prayer and other holy practices of which you had made a kind of habit, which at last roused within you no feelings of faith or compunction; and you shall know whether lukewarmness, negligence, the little fruit which attended them, and the little disposition within you previous to them, have not, in my eyes, constituted so many infidelities for which you shall be judged without mercy.

I will search into the causes of that removal from the world and from pleasure, that singularity of conduct, that affectation of modesty and regularity; and, perhaps, I shall find them more in humour, temperament, and indolence, than in faith; and that, in a life of regularity and retirement, according to the opinion of men, you may still have preserved all your self-love, all your attachment to the flesh, and all the niceties of

sensuality; and, in a word, all the sins of the most worldly souls.

I will search, even to the bottom, that pretended zeal for my glory, which made you so deeply lament over the scandals of which you were a spectator, which led you to condemn them with such confidence and pride, and to blaze out, with such warmth, against the irregularities and weaknesses of your brethren; and that zeal, perhaps, will become in my sight, only a natural severity of temper, a malignity of disposition, an inclination towards censure and upbraiding, an indiscreet warmth, a vain and ostentatious zeal; and, far from finding you full of zeal for my glory, and for the salvation of your brethren, you shall appear before me, unjust, obstinate, malicious, and rash.

I will demand an account from you of those splendid talents which, it would appear, you employed only for my glory and for the instruction of believers; and which had drawn upon you the blessings of the just, and the acclamations even of the worldly; and, perhaps, that continual attention to, and gratification of your own pride, the desire of surpassing others, and your sensibility of human applause, will prove the prominent features of your works to be only the works of man and the fruits of pride; and that I shall curse those labours which had sprung from so impure a source.

Great God! What works, upon which I had so firmly depended, shall then be found dead in thine eyes! How terrible shall be that discrimination! And, of all the actions which we have performed even for heaven, how few wilt thou acknowledge as thine, and deem worthy of reward!

Do not from thence conclude, my brethren, that it is

then needless to labour for salvation, under the idea that the righteous Judge shall seek only the condemnation of men: Only their condemnation! My brethren, He comes only to save them, and his mercies will far surpass even his justice. But behold the conclusion which you ought rather to draw. Those righteous souls whom you so frequently accuse of excessive scruples in the practice of the duties of a Christian life, as though they carried things too far; those souls, exposed to the light of God, shall appear lukewarm, sensual, imperfect, and perhaps criminal: and you, who live in the dangers and pleasures of the world; you, who devote to religion and your salvation only the most idle moments of your life; you, who scarcely mingle a single work of piety with an entire year of dissipation and inutility, in what situation shall you then be, my dear hearer? If those, who shall have only laudable works to present, shall yet be in danger of rejection, what shall be your destiny, you, who have only a life entirely worldly to offer? If the tree full of blossoms be treated with such rigour, what shall become of the withered and barren tree? And, if the just be even with difficulty saved; I speak not of the sinner, for he is already judged; how shall the worldly soul, who lives without either vice or virtue, how shall he dare to appear?

You say very often, my dear hearer, that your conscience does not reproach you with great crimes; that, if not good, neither are you bad, and that your only sin is indolence and sloth. Ah! you shall then know yourself before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. You shall see whether the testimony of your conscience, which reproached you not with crimes, and left you scarcely any thing culpable to confess, was not a terrible blind-

ness, to which the justice of God had always delivered you up. From the dread in which you shall see the just, you shall find what ought to be your own fears; and whether the confidence in which you have always lived, sprung from the peace of a good conscience, or from the false security of a worldly one.

O my God! cries St. Augustin, could I but see, at this moment, the state of my soul as thou shalt then lay it open to me! Could I divest myself of those prejudices which blind me; could I but mistrust those examples which confirm me, those customs which quiet me, those talents which dazzle me, those praises which seduce me, that rank and those titles which deceive me, and those soothing expressions of a sacred guide, which form all my security; could I but divest myself of that self-love which is the source of all my errors, and behold myself alone at thy feet, in thy light: O my God! what horror would I not feel for myself? And what measures would I not take, in humbling myself before thee, to prevent the public shame of that awful day, when the councils of hearts, and the secrecy of thoughts, shall be manifested? For, my brethren, not only shall the sinner be shewn to himself, but he shall likewise be shewn to all creatures.

Part II. The mixture of good and wicked men, inevitable on this earth, gives birth to two disorders. In the first place, through favour of that mixture, concealed vice escapes that public ignominy which is its due; and retired virtue receives not the applause it merits. In the second place, the sinner, high in honours, frequently fills the most distinguished offices, while the good and pious man lives in humiliation, and crawls like a slave at his feet. Now, on that terrible day, a double manifestation shall be made, which will

repair that two-fold disorder. In the first place, the sinful will be marked out from the just by the public exposure of their conscience. In the second place, they will be distinguished by separation from them, and by the difference of their stations before the throne of glory.

In order fully to comprehend all the shame and confusion with which the criminal soul shall then be covered, when shewn to all creatures, and when all his vices, even the most secret, are exposed to the light, it requires only to pay attention: In the *first* place, To the number and character of the spectators who shall witness his shame: *Secondly*, To the care he had taken to conceal his weaknesses and debaucheries from the eyes of men, while on the earth: *Thirdly*, and *lastly*, To his personal qualities, which will render his confusion still more deep and overwhelming.

Here figure to yourselves, then, my brethren, a criminal before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, surrounded by angels and men; the just, the sinful, his relations, his subjects, his masters, his friends, his enemies, all having their eyes fixed on him; present at the terrible scrutiny which the just Judge will make into his actions, his desires, and his thoughts; and forced, in spite of themselves, to assist at his judgment, and to witness the justice of the sentence which the Son of Man shall pronounce against him. All the resources which, on this earth, might soften the most humiliating confusion, shall fail, on that day, to the unfaithful soul.

In the first place. On the earth, when we have been guilty of a fault which has sunk us into contempt, the whole charge has turned on a certain number of witnesses confined to our nation, or to the place of our birth; we may remove ourselves from them, in the

course of time, to avoid continually reading, in their eyes, the remembrance and reproach of our past shame; and we may change our place of dwelling to go elsewhere among strangers, to recover a reputation which we had already lost. But, on that great day, all men assembled shall be acquainted with the secret history of your manners and of your conscience: you shall no longer have it in your power to hide yourself far from the looks of the spectators, to seek new countries, and, like Cain, to fly into the desert. Each shall be fixed immoveable in the place marked out for him, bearing on his forehead the sentence of his condemnation and the history of his whole life, obliged to sustain the eyes of the universe, and the whole shame of his weaknesses. There shall no longer, then, be any hidden spot wherein he may conceal himself from the public attention; the light of God, and the glory of the Son of Man, will fill the heavens and the earth; and, in all that immensity of space around you, you will, in every quarter, discover only watchful eyes fixed on you.

Secondly. On the earth, when our shame even becomes public, and we are degraded in the minds of men, in consequence of some striking fault, there are yet always some friends prejudiced in our favour, whose esteem and society recompense us, in some measure, for the public contempt, and whose kindness assists us in sustaining the inveteracy of the general censure. But, on this occasion, the presence of our friends will be the object by far the most insupportable to our shame. If sinners, like ourselves, they will reproach us with our common pleasures and our example, which, perhaps, have been the first rock upon which their innocence split: if just, inasmuch as they

had believed us to be children of light, they will reproach us with the abuse of their good opinion, and their friendship. You loved the just, shall they say to us, and you hated righteousness; you protected virtue, yet, in your heart, you placed vice on the throne; in us you sought that probity, that fidelity, and that security which you found not in your worldly friends, but you sought not the Lord who formed all these virtues in our heart; ah! did not the author of all our gifts deserve to be more loved, more sought after than we!

And behold the third resource, which shall likewise fail, to the utter confusion of the criminal soul. For, should no friends be found on this earth to interest themselves in our misfortunes, there are always, at least, indifferent persons whom our faults do not wound or excite against us. But, on that terrible day, we shall have no indifferent spectators. The just, so sensible on the earth to the calamities of their brethren, so ingenious in excusing their faults, and so ready in covering them with the veil of charity, in order, at least, to soften, if they cannot find an apparent excuse for them in the eyes of men; the just, then, divested, like the Son of Man, of that indulgence and pity which they had exercised towards their brethren on the earth, shall hiss at the sinner, to use the expression of the prophet, shall insult him, and shall demand his punishment from the Lord, to avenge his glory; they shall enter into the zeal and the interests of his justice; and, becoming judges themselves, they shall mock him, says the prophet, and say, "Lo, this is the man that "made not God his strength; but trusted in the abun- "dance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his "wickedness. This is that foolish man, who believed

" himself the only sage on the earth, and who consid-
" ered the life of the just as a folly; who created for
" himself, in the favour of the great, in the vanity of
" titles and dignities, in the extent of his lands and
" possessions, in the good opinion and applauses of
" men, supports of clay, which were to perish with
" him. Where, now, are your gods, your rock in
" whom you trusted? Let them rise up and help you,
" and be your protection."

Nor shall sinners be more indulgent to his misery; they will feel for him all that horror which they shall be forced to feel for themselves; the fellowship of misfortune, which ought to unite, will create only feelings of eternal hatred and hardness of heart, which shall fill their hearts with nothing but sentiments of cruelty and anger against their brethren; and they will hate in others the same crimes from which all their miseries spring. In a word, the most distant and savage nations, to whom the name of Jesus Christ hath never been announced, and who have arrived but too late, to the knowledge of truth, shall rise up against you, and declare, that, if the miracles which God had, in vain, operated amongst you, had been wrought before their eyes; that if they, like you, had been enlightened by the gospel, and sustained by the assistance of faith, they would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes, and laid out to advantage, for their salvation, those favours which you have abused for your destruction.

Such shall be the confusion of the reprobate. Accursed before God, he will find himself at the same time, the outcast of heaven and of earth, the shame and curse of all creatures: even the inanimate beings, which he had forced to be subservient to his passions,

and which groaned, as St. Paul expresses it, in the expectation of deliverance from that shameful servitude, shall, after their manner, rise up against him. The sun, the light of which he had abused, shall be darkened, as if it were not to shine on his crimes: the stars shall disappear, as if to tell him, that they have too long witnessed his iniquitous passions: the earth shall shake under his feet, as if to eject, from its bosom, a monster which it could no longer bear: and the whole universe, to use the language of Solomon, shall arm against him to avenge the glory of the Lord, whom he has insulted. Alas! we dearly love to be condoled with in our misfortunes: mere indifference alone irritates and wounds us: but here, not only shall all hearts be shut to our misfortunes, but all beholders shall insult our shame, and the only portion left to the sinner shall be his confusion, his despair, and his crimes. First circumstance therefore which shall tend to the confusion of the criminal soul, will be the multitude of witnesses.

The second, may be easily conceived, from the care and anxiety men take, whilst living on the earth, to disguise and conceal themselves from the eyes of men. For, my brethren, the world is a great theatre, on which almost every one acts a borrowed character. As we are full of passions, and as the passions have always in them something mean and despicable, our whole attention is employed in concealing their meanness, and in endeavouring to give ourselves out for what we are not: iniquity is always treacherous and deceitful. Thus, your whole life, you, above all, who listen to me, and who consider duplicity of character, only as a knowledge of the world and of the court; your whole life has been only one train of dissimula-

tion and artifice; even your sincerest and most intimate friends have only, in part, known you; you were beyond the reach of the world, for you changed character, sentiment, and inclination, according to circumstances and the disposition of those to whom you wished to make yourselves agreeable; through these means you had acquired the reputation of ability and wisdom; but on that day, the mean and treacherous soul will be seen in its native colours, destitute of probity and truth, and its principal virtue, the concealment of its baseness and meanness.

You, likewise, whom a sex more jealous of honour, had rendered still more anxious to conceal your weaknesses from the eyes of men, you were so artful in saving yourself from discovery; you managed so adroitly to deceive the eyes of a husband, the vigilance of a mother, and, perhaps, the probity of a confessor: and you would not have survived the accident which had made known your precautions and artifices. Vain cares! you only covered your depravity, to use the language of the prophet, with a spider's web, which on that great day, the Son of Man shall dissipate with a single breath. In the presence of all assembled nations, saith the Lord, I will gather around thee, all thy lovers. They shall see that eternal train of artifice, disguise, and meanness; that shameful traffic of protestations and oaths which thou hast made instrumental to so many different passions, and, in order, at the same time, to lull their credulity; they shall see them, and, tracing even to the source, those criminal favours which thou hast bestowed on them, they shall find them not in their pretended merit as thou hadst wished to make them believe, but in thine own infamous character, in a heart naturally lewd; who

makest a boast of having a heart so noble, so sincere, and so incapable of being touched by aught but merit. And all this shall take place before the eyes of the universe; of those friends whom an appearance of regularity had preserved to you; of your relations who were ignorant of the disgrace with with which you covered them; and of that husband who had so much depended on your affection and fidelity.

O my God! is there an abyss sufficiently profound in the earth, in which the unrighteous would not then wish to hide himself? For, in the world, men never see but the outside and the evil example of our vices; and, besides, our confusion is shared and countenanced by those who are continually guilty of the same faults. But, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, your errors shall be seen even in your heart; that is to say, their birth, their progress, their most private motives, and a thousand shameful and personal circumstances, which, even more than the crimes themselves, shall cover you with shame: your confusion will be one, in which none shall bear a share, and, consequently, will be entirely your own.

The last circumstance, which shall render the shame of the sinner overwhelming, is his personal qualities.

You passed in the world, for a faithful, sincere, and generous friend: it will be discovered that you were vile, perfidious, interested, without faith, honour, probity, conscience, or character. You were supposed to possess a towering mind, above all the vulgar prejudices; but that day shall lay open the most humiliating meannesses and circumstances, at which the vilest soul would expire with shame. In the world you were regarded as a man of integrity, and of an appro-

ved probity in the performance of your duties; that reputation had perhaps attracted fresh honours, and acquired you the public confidence; you, nevertheless, abused the credulity of men; those pompous shews of equity concealed an unjust and servile soul, and a thousand times had your fidelity been in secret betrayed, and your conscience corrupted by views of fortune and motives of interest; you were apparently adorned with sanctity and righteousness; you had always assumed the semblance of the just; you were believed to be the friend of God, and the faithful observer of his law; yet your heart was not upright before the Lord; under the cloak of religion, you covered a defiled conscience and ignominious mysteries; and you walked in the way of holy things, more securely to attain your purposes. Alas! on that day of revelation, you will undeceive the whole universe; those who had seen you on the earth, astonished at your unexpected lot, shall search among the reprobate to discover the upright man; the hope of the hypocrite shall then be overthrown: you had enjoyed the esteem of men without right; you shall be known, and God avenged. Lastly, Yet, how shall I dare to say it, and reveal the shame of my brethren? You were perhaps the dispenser of holy things, high in honour in the temple of God; the charge of faith, of doctrine, and of piety, was intrusted to you; you appeared every day in the sanctuary, clothed in the distinguished garments of your dignity, offering up pure gifts and sacrifices without stain; you were intrusted with the secrets of consciences; you sustained the weak in faith; you spoke of wisdom among the instructed; and, under all that is most august or most holy in religion, you perhaps concealed whatever is most execrable on earth. You

were an impostor, a man of sin seated in the temple of God; you instructed others, and you taught not yourself; you inspired horror against idols, and your days were only numbered by your sacrileges. Ah! the mystery of iniquity shall then be revealed; and you shall at last be known for what you have always been, the curse of heaven, and the shame of the earth.

Such, my brethren, will be the confusion of the criminal soul. And it will not be a transitory confusion. In the world we have only the first shame of a fault to undergo: the noise of it gradually dies away; new adventures at last take the place of ours; and the remembrance of our disgrace fades away, and disappears with the rumour which had published them. But, at the great day, shame shall eternally remain upon the criminal soul; there shall no longer be any fresh events to obliterate his crimes and his confusion; nothing shall then change: all shall be fixed and eternal: that which he shall have appeared before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, that will he for ever appear: even the nature of his torments shall incessantly publish the nature of his crimes; and his shame shall every day be renewed in his punishment. My brethren, reflections here are needless; and, if some remains of faith still exist within you, it is for you to sound your own consciences, and, from this moment, to adopt such measures as may enable you to sustain the manifestation of that great day.

But, after having shewn you the public confusion with which the sinner shall be covered; how happy should I be to lay open to you the glory and the consolation of the truly just man, when the secrets of his conscience shall be exposed to the universe; when the whole mystery of his heart shall be unfolded; that

heart, all the loveliness of which, concealed from the eyes of men, was known only to God; that heart in which he had always imagined stains and defilements, and the holiness and innocency of which his humility had concealed from himself; that heart in which God alone had always dwelled, and which he had taken pleasure in adorning and enriching with his gifts and grace! What new wonders then shall that divine sanctuary, hitherto so impenetrable, offer to the eyes of the beholders, when the veil shall be removed from it! What fervent desires! What secret victories! What heroical sacrifices! What pure prayers! What tender lamentations! What faith! What grandeur! What elevation above all those vain objects which form all the desires and hopes of men! Then shall it indeed be seen, that nothing was so great, or so worthy of admiration in the world, as a truly just man; nothing so noble as those who were considered useless, because they were so to our passions, and whose obscure and retired life was so much despised. Then shall it be made manifest that the acts of the faithful soul possessed more lustre and grandeur than all those great events which have taken place on the earth; were alone worthy of being written down in the eternal books; and offered to the eyes of God a sight more worthy of angels and men than all the victories and conquests which swell the pages of history, to which pompous monuments are erected in order to eternize their remembrance, and which shall then be considered but as puerile squabbles, or the fruit of pride and the human passions. One of the great disorders of the earth, the concealment, namely, of vice from public shame, and of virtue from public applause, will then be repaired.

Another disorder, to which the mixture of the good and of the bad gives birth in the world, is the inequality of conditions, and the unjust exchange of their lots. It is with the present age as with the image the mystery of which was explained by Daniel: the just, like the clay which we trample under our feet, or, like iron hardened in the fire of tribulation, occupy in general, on earth, only the meanest and most contemptible stations; while, on the contrary, the sinful and the worldly, typified by gold and silver, the vain objects of their passions, almost always find themselves placed at the head of affairs, and in the most eminent places. Now, this is a disorder; and, although the good be thereby exercised, and the wicked hardened; although this confusion of good and evil enter into the order of Providence; and that, by ways and means impenetrable to man, God makes use of them to lead the just and the sinner to his purposes, yet it is necessary that the Son of Man should gather together all things; and that a distinction should be made between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. Now, behold the great spectacle of that last day: order shall be re-established; the good separated from the wicked: the sheep set on his right hand, and the goats on the left.

This separation will be, in the first place, an unusual one. In order to determine what rank you ought to hold in this awful scene, you will not be asked what were your names, your birth, your titles, or your dignities; these were but as vapours which had no reality but in the public illusion; you will be examined only to ascertain whether you be an unclean animal or an innocent sheep: the prince shall not be separated from the subject; the noble from the peasant; the poor from

the powerful; the conqueror from the vanquished; but the chaff from the good grain; the vessels of honour from the vessels of shame; the goats from the sheep.

The Son of Man shall be seen on high, surveying the mingled nations and people assembled at his feet, and reading, in that spectacle, the history of the universe, that is to say, of the passions or of the virtues of men; he shall be seen gathering together his chosen from the four quarters; choosing them from among every tongue, every situation, and every country; re-uniting the children of Israel dispersed through the universe; unfolding the secret history of a new and holy people; bringing forth to view heroes of faith till then unknown in the world; distinguishing ages not by the victories of conquerors, by the establishment or the fall of empires, by the politeness or the barbarity of the times, or by the great characters who have appeared in every age, but by the various triumphs of grace, by the hidden victories of the just over their passions, by the establishment of his reign in the heart, by the heroical fortitude of a persecuted believer. You shall see him change the face of all things, create a new heaven and a new earth, and reduce that infinite variety of people, titles, conditions, and dignities, to the simple divisions of holy and reprobate, to the goats and the sheep.

This separation will be, in the second place, a grievous one. The father shall be separated from his child; friend from friend; brother from brother: the one shall be taken, the other left. Death, which deprives us of the dearest friends, and whose loss occasions us so many sighs and tears, leaves us, at least, a consolation in the hope of being one day re-united to them. Here, the separation is eternal; no hope of re-

union shall again exist; we shall no more have relatives, father, child, or friend; no other ties than everlasting flames, which shall for ever unite us to the reprobate.

This separation, will be in the third place, an ignominious one. We are hurt when neglected, or left with the crowd on any striking occasion; we are peevish and irritated, when, in the distribution of favours, we see persons inferior in rank, carrying off the principal offices, our services forgotten, and those, whom we had always seen far below us, now exalted and placed over our heads: but, on that great day, the preference shall be accompanied with circumstances the most humiliating and the most galling to the criminal soul. In the midst of that universal silence, and that dreadful expectation, in which each one shall be kept with respect to his destiny, you shall see the Son of Man advancing from the heavens, with crowns in one hand and the rod of wrath in the other, to carry off, from beside you, a just soul, whose innocence you had, perhaps, calumniated by rash expressions, or whose virtues you had insulted, by impious pleasantries; a believer who was, perhaps, born your subject; a Lazarus, who had, perhaps, in vain, importuned you with the recital of his wants and poverty; or a rival whom you had always beheld with an eye of scorn, and upon whose ruins, your intrigues and artifices had perhaps exalted you. You shall see the Son of Man place a crown of immortality on his head, and seat him at his right hand, while you, like the proud Haman, rejected, humbled, and degraded, shall have before your eyes only the preparation of your punishment.

Yes, my brethren, every galling and overwhelming

circumstance shall attend that preference. A savage converted to faith, shall be ranked among the sheep, while a Christian inheritor of the promises, shall be left among the goats. The layman shall ascend, like the eagle, while the minister of Jesus Christ shall grovel on the earth, covered with shame and reproach. The man of the world shall pass to the right hand, while the recluse passes to the left. The wise, the learned, and the critic, shall be driven to the side of the unclean; and the ideot, who knew not how to answer even the common salutations, shall be placed on a throne of glory and light. Rahab, a sinful woman, shall mount up to the heavenly Sion along with the true Israelites; while the sister of Moses, and the spouse of Jesus Christ, shall be driven from the camp and the tents of Israel, and appear covered with a shameful leprosy. Thou art determined, O my God! that nothing shall be wanting towards the despair of the criminal. It is not sufficient that he shall be overwhelmed under the weight of his own misery; but thou shalt create for him a new punishment in the felicity of the just, who shall be seen preferred to him, and conducted by angels into the bosom of immortality.

What a change of scene, my brethren, shall then take place in the universe! It is then that all scandals being plucked out from the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the just wholly separated from the sinful, they shall form a holy nation, a chosen race, and the church of the first-born, whose names were written down in heaven. It is then that an association with the wicked, inevitable, to be sure, on earth, shall no longer occasion their faith to lament, or their innocence to tremble. It is then that their lot, no longer connected with the unfaithful or the hypocrite, shall no longer constrain them

to be witnesses of their crimes, and sometimes even the involuntary agents of their passions. It is then that all the bonds of society, of authority, or dependence, which attached them on this earth to the impious and to the worldly, being broken asunder, they shall no longer say with the prophet, "Lord, why length-"enest thou out here our banishment and our sojourn-"ing? How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs "of every field wither for the wickedness of them that "dwell therein?" Lastly, it is then that their tears shall be changed into joy, and their sighs into thanksgivings; they shall pass to the right hand as the sheep, while the left shall be reserved for the goats and the impious.

The disposition of the universe being thus made; all the nations of the earth being thus divided, and each one fixed in the place allotted to him; surprise, terror, despair, and confusion marked in the countenance of one part; and joy, serenity, and confidence, in that of the other: the eyes of the just raised on high towards the Son of Man, from whom they await their deliverance; those of the impious frightfully fixed on the earth, and almost piercing the abyss with their looks, as if already to mark out the place which is destined for them: the King of glory, says the gospel, placed in the middle, shall come forward; and, turning towards those who shall be at his right hand, with an aspect full of sweetness and majesty, and sufficient of itself to console them for all their past sufferings, he shall say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foun-"dation of the world. Sinners had always considered "you as the outcast, and most useless portion of the "earth: let them now learn that the world itself ex-

"isted only for you, that all was created for you, and "that all hath finished from the moment that your "number was completed. Quit, then, an earth where "you had always been travellers and strangers; fol- "low me into the immortal paths of my glory and feli- "city, as you have followed me in those of my humilia- "tion and sufferings. Your toils have endured but for "an instant; the happiness you are about to enjoy "shall be without end."

Turning then to the left, with vengeance and anger in his eyes, and directing his dreadful glance, like an avenging thunderbolt, on that crowd of guilty, he shall say, with a voice which (to use the language of the prophet,) shall burst open the bowels of the abyss to swallow them up, not as when upon the cross, "Fa- "ther, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, "prepared for the devil and his angels. You were "the chosen of the earth, you are the cursed of my "Father; your pleasures have been fleeting and tran- "sitory, your anguish shall be eternal." Ascending then with the Son of Man, the righteous shall begin to sing, Thou art rich in mercy, O Lord! and thou hast crowned thy gifts in recompensing our good actions. Then shall the impious curse the Author of their being, and the fatal day which brought them forth; or, rather, their anger shall be levelled against themselves, as the authors of their misery and destruction. The abyss shall open; the heavens shall bow down; the repro- bate, says the gospel, shall depart into everlasting pun- ishment, and the just into life eternal. And this dis- position of things shall change no more.

After a relation so awful, and so proper to make an impression on the most hardened heart, I cannot con-

clude, without addressing to you the words which Moses formerly addressed to the Israelites, after having laid before them the dreadful threatenings, and the soothing promises, contained in the Book of the Law. "Children of Israel, behold I set before you this day "a blessing and a curse: a blessing, if ye obey the "commandments of the Lord your God, which I com- "mand you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey "the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn "aside, out of the way which I command you this day, "to go after other gods which ye have not known."

And now, my brethren, allow me to conclude my discourse with these remarks. It belongs to you to choose and to declare yourselves: the right hand and the left are before you: the promises and the threatenings; the blessings and the curses. Your destiny turns on this awful alternative: you shall either be on the side of Satan and his angels, or you shall be chosen with Jesus Christ and his saints. There is no middle way: I have pointed out the path which leads to eternal life, and that which leads to perdition. In which of these two do you now walk? And on which side do you believe that you should find yourselves, were you, at this moment, to appear before the awful tribunal? We die generally as we have lived: tremble therefore lest your destiny of this day be your everlasting destiny. Quit, from this moment, the paths of the sinful; begin to live like the just, if you wish, on that last day, to be placed at the right hand, and to mount, along with them, into the abode of a blessed immortality.

SERMON XXXI.

THE HAPPINESS OF THE JUST.

(PREACHED ON ALL-SAINTS DAY, BEFORE LOUIS XIV.)

MATT. v. 4.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

SIRE,

IF the world were to address you, instead of Jesus Christ, it would undoubtedly not hold the same language.

Happy the Prince, would it say, who has never fought but to conquer; who has concluded an honourable war, by a still more honourable peace; and who has always risen superior to prosperity as well as to adversity.

Happy the Prince, who after a long and flourishing reign, enjoys at leisure, the fruits of his glory, the love of his people, the esteem of his enemies, the admiration of the universe, the hope of a numerous posterity, and the advantages arising from his conquests, from the magnificence of his work, and the wisdom of his laws; and who has nothing left to wish for, but the continuance of what he possesses.

Thus, Sire, would the world speak. But Jesus Christ speaks not the language of the world.

Happy, he tells you, not he who builds his hopes on this world, but he who looks forward to the world to come, and lives in the neglect of himself, and of every earthly thing; "for his is the kingdom of heaven."

Happy, not he, whose reign and actions, history shall immortalize in the remembrance of men, but he whose tears shall have effaced the memory of his sins, from the mind of God himself, "for he shall be comforted."

Happy, not he, whose conquests may have extended the boundaries of his empire, but he who shall have confined his desires and his passions within the boundaries of the law of God; "for he shall inherit the earth."

Happy, not he, who, raised by the testimony of the world, above all preceding sovereigns, tranquilly enjoys his greatness and glory, but he, who finding nothing in a throne worthy of his heart, looks for perfect happiness in this world, only in the practice of virtue and justice; "for he shall be filled."

Happy, not he, to whom men have given the pompous titles of great and invincible, but he, to whom the unfortunate shall, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, give the title of father, and merciful; "for he shall obtain mercy."

Happy, (to conclude,) not he, who, the arbiter of his enemies' fate, has more than once given peace to the world, but he, who has been able to give peace to himself, and to banish from his heart, the vices and disorderly inclinations which disturb its tranquillity; "for he shall be called, the child of God.

Such, Sire, are those to whom Jesus Christ gives the appellation of happy: and the gospel acknowledges no other happiness on the earth, than virtue and innocence.

Great God! it is not then that long train of unexampled prosperity, with which thou hast favoured his reign, that can render him the happiest of kings. It is by this means, that he becomes great; but he is not thereby happy. His felicity begins with his piety. Whatever does not sanctify man, can never make man happy. Whatever does not place thee, O my God! in the heart, places there either vanities which leave it empty, or real evils which fill it with disquiet; and a pure conscience is the only source of real enjoyment.

It is to the manifestation of this truth, my brethren, that the church confines the solemnities of this day. As one of the principal artifices, employed by the world, in order to prevent us from imitating the Saints, is the vulgar error, that their lives were passed in gloom and sorrow; the church, in renewing their memory on this day, gives us to remember, at the same time, that not only do they now enjoy an immortal felicity in heaven, but also that they have been the only happy of the earth; that he who carries iniquity in his bosom, always carries terror and anxiety; and that the lot of the godly is a thousand times more tranquil and more satisfactory, even in this world, than that of sinners.

But, in what does the happiness of the just in this life consist? It consists, in the first place, In the manifestation of truth concealed from the sages of the world. *Secondly*, In the comforts of grace denied to the lovers of the world. In the lights of faith which soften the sufferings of the believing soul, and render

those of the sinner still more bitter: this is my first point. In the comforts of grace which calm all the passions, and which, being denied to a corrupted heart, leave it a prey to itself: this is the last. Let us develop these two truths, so calculated to render virtue amiable, and the example of the saints beneficial.

PART I. Our sorrows proceed, in general, from our errors; and we are unhappy, says St. Ambrose, only because we judge erroneously with respect to good and evil. The just, who are children of light, are, therefore, much happier than sinners, because they are more enlightened. The same lights which correct their judgments alleviate their sufferings: and faith, which shews the world to them, such as it is, changes, into sources of consolation for them, the very same events in which souls, delivered up to the passions, find the source of all their disquiets.

And, in order to make you sensible of a truth so honourable to virtue, observe, I pray you, my brethren, that, whether the contrite sinner recall the past, and those times of error which preceded his penitence; whether he pay attention to what passes before his eyes in the world; or, lastly, whether he look forward to the future, every thing consoles, every thing strengthens him in the cause of virtue, which he has adopted, every thing unites to render his condition infinitely more pleasing than that of him, who lives in dissipation, and who finds, in these same situations, only sensations of bitterness and terror.

For, in the *first* place, however the sinner may be delivered up to all the fervency of his heart, he is not so violently hurried away, by present gratifications, but that he sometimes casts a look back on those years of iniquity which have accumulated behind him.

Those days of darkness, which he has consecrated to debauchery, have not so completely perished, but that, at certain periods, they obtrude themselves upon his remembrance. Gloomy and troublesome images force themselves upon his soul, and, from time to time, arouse him from his lethargy by exhibiting in one mass, that shocking series of crimes, which make less impression, during their commission, because he only sees them in succession. At one glance of his eye, he sees favours always contemned, inspirations always rejected, the perversion of a heart naturally good, and formed, it would appear, for virtue, weaknesses at which he now blushes, and iniquities against which he would wish for ever to shut his eyes.

Behold what the sinner leaves behind him. He is miserable if he look back to the past. His whole happiness is centered in the present moment; and, to be happy, he must never think, but allow himself, like the dumb creation, to be led away by the attraction of the present objects; and, to preserve his tranquillity, he must either extinguish or stupify his reason. Hence arise those maxims so unworthy of humanity, and so common in the world; that too much reason is a poor advantage; that reflection spoils all the pleasures of life; and that, in order to be happy, the less we think the better. O man! was it to thy misfortune then, that Heaven has given thee that reason by which thou art enlightened, or was it to assist thee in search of that truth, which alone can render thee happy? Could that divine light, which embellishes thy being, be a punishment rather than a gift of the Creator? And, should it so gloriously distinguish thee from the brute, only that thy condition may be the more wretched?

Yes, my brethren, such is the lot of an unbeliev-

ing soul. Intoxication, the delirium of passion, and the extinction of reason, can alone render him happy; and, as that situation is merely momentary, the instant the mind becomes calm and regains its reason, the charm is dissolved, happiness vanishes, and man finds himself alone with his conscience and his crimes.

But how different is the lot of a soul who walks in thy ways, oh God! and how much to be pitied is the world which knows thee not! In effect, the sweetest thoughts of the righteous are those by which the past is recalled. He there encounters, it is true, that portion of his life which had been engrossed by the world and the passions; and the remembrance, I confess, fills him with shame before the sanctity of his God, and forces from him tears of compunction and sorrow. But, what consolation does he not find in his tears and in his grief!

For, my brethren, the penitent can never retrace the whole train of his past errors, without discovering all the proceedings of God's mercy upon him: The various ways by which his wisdom hath gradually, and, as it were, step by step, conducted him to the blessed moment of his conversion: The many unexpected marks of favour shewn him, as disgrace, loss, death, treachery, and affliction; all provided by a watchful Providence to facilitate the means of breaking asunder his chains: Those special attentions of God, even when in the paths of iniquity: Those feelings of disgust, even in the midst of his pleasures, provided for him by his goodness: Those inward calls which incessantly prompted him to return to virtue and duty: That internal monitor which followed him every where, and unceasingly repeated to him, as formerly to St. Augustin: Madman! How long wilt thou hunt after pleasures which can never make thee happy? When

wilt thou terminate thy troubles with thy crimes? What more dost thou require to open thine eyes to the world, than thine own experience itself, of the weariness and unhappyness of a worldly life? Try if, in belonging to me, thou shalt not be more happy, and if I am not sufficient to fill the soul which possesses me?

Such are the feelings which a retrospect of the past creates in the penitent. He there sees the accomplices of his former pleasures still delivered up, by God's justice, to the errors of the world and of the passions, and he alone chosen, separated, and called to the knowledge of the truth.

With what peace and consolation does that reflection fill the believing soul! "How infinite, O my God," cries he with the prophet, "are thy mercies! Thou "hast covered me in my mother's womb: Thou hast "compassed my path, and my lying down, and all "my ways have been known to thee: what have I "done for thee more than so many other sinners whose "eyes thou deignest not to open, and who manifest the "severity of thy judgments and of thy justice? How "marvellous, O God! are all thy works; and that my "soul knoweth right well." The first advantage, therefore, of the righteous, is the consolation which the remembrance even of their past infidelities affords them.

But, secondly, if they find a source of solid consolation in reviewing the past, their piety is not less comforted while regarding the present occurrences of the world. And here, my brethren, I shall endeavour to shew you how essentially requisite is virtue to the happiness of life, and how that very world, which gives birth to all the passions, and, consequently, to all the unhappiness of sinners, becomes the sweetest and most consolatory exercise of the faith of the just.

What, indeed, is the world even to the worldly themselves, who love it, who seem intoxicated with its delights, and unable to subsist without it? The world? It is the scene of an eternal servitude, where no one lives for himself, and where, in order to be happy, we must bring ourselves to hug our chains, and to love our slavery. The world? It is the scene of a daily revolution of events, which successively arouse, in the hearts of its actors, the most violent and the most melancholy passions, cruel antipathies, hateful perplexities, torturing fears, devouring jealousies, and corroding cares. The world? It is a land of curse, where pleasure itself is productive only of bitterness and thorns. Gaming fatigues and exhausts by its frenzies and caprices: conversation becomes wearisome through the contrarieties of tempers and the opposition of sentiments: passions and criminal attachments are followed with disgust, disappointment, and scandal: theatres, whose spectators are only gross and dissolute beings, incapable of being roused but by the most shocking excesses of debauchery, appear insipid while exciting only those delicate passions, which serve to shew guilt at a distance, and to lay snares for innocence. Lastly, the world is a place where hope itself, that sweet and pleasing passion, renders all men unhappy; where those, who have nothing more to hope, believe themselves still more miserable; were every thing that pleases soon ceases to please; and where inanity or listless insipidity is the best and the most supportable lot to be expected. Such is the world, my brethren; nor is this that obscure world, to which neither the higher pleasures, nor the charms of prosperity, of favour, and of affluence are known: it is the world in its most brilliant point of view; it is the world of the

court; it is you yourselves who now listen to me. Such is the world; nor is this one of those fanciful paintings of which the reality is no where to be found. I paint the world after your own heart, that is to say, such as you know it to be, and such as you yourselves continually experience it.

Such, nevertheless, is the place in which all sinners seek their happiness. This is their country. Here would they willingly eternize themselves. Such is that world which they prefer to the eternal inheritance, and to all the promises of faith. Great God! how just art thou in punishing man through his passions themselves, and in permitting him, while he wishes to seek his happiness elsewhere than in thee, who alone art the true peace of his heart, to form for himself a ridiculous felicity of his fears, his feelings of disgust and weariness, and his disquietudes!

But it is a fortunate circumstance for virtue, that the same world, so tiresome and so insupportable to sinners who seek their happiness in it, becomes a source of the most soothing reflections to the righteous, who consider it as a place of exile, and a foreign land.

For, in the *first* place, the inconstancy of the world, so dreaded by those delivered up to it, supplies a thousand motives of consolation to the believing soul. Nothing appears to him either constant or durable upon the earth; neither the most flourishing fortunes, nor the warmest friendships, nor the most brilliant reputations, nor the most envied favour. He sees a sovereign wisdom through all, which delights, it would appear, in making a sport of men, by alternately exalting them on the ruins of each other; hurling down those at the top of the wheel, in order to elevate those who, only a moment before, were groveling at the bottom;

introducing, every day, on the theatre of life, new heroes to eclipse those who formerly played on it so brilliant a part; and incessantly displaying new scenes to the universe. He sees men passing their whole lives in ferments, projects, and plots; ever on the watch to surprise each other, or to avoid being surprised; always eager and active to profit by the retreat, the disgrace, or the death of a rival; and drawing from these great lessons, so fitted to inculcate contempt of the world, only fresh motives for ambition and cupidity; always engrossed either by their fears or by their hopes: always uneasy either for the present or for the future; never tranquil, struggling for quiet, and yet every moment removing themselves farther and farther from it.

O man! why art thou so ingenious in the art of rendering thyself miserable? Such is the reflection of the believing soul.—That happiness thou seekest is more easily attained. It is necessary neither to traverse seas nor to conquer kingdoms. Depart not from thyself, and thou wilt be happy.

How sweet then do the sorrows of virtue appear to the good man, when he compares them with the bitter disappointments and the endless agitations of sinners! What transport does he not feel to have at last found a place of rest and of safety, while he sees the lovers of the world still tost about, at the mercy of the passions and of human hopes! Thus the Israelites formerly, after having escaped from the dangers of the Red Sea, and beholding from afar Pharaoh and all the nobility of Egypt still at the mercy of the waters, felt all the luxury of their own safety, thought the barren paths of the desert delightful, and were insensible to every hardship of their journey; comparing their

lot with that of the Egyptians, and far from giving vent to a complaint or a murmur, they sung with Moses, that divine hymn of praise and of thanksgiving, in which are celebrated, with such magnificence, the wonders and the tender mercies of the Lord.

In the next place, The injustice of the world, so humbling to those who love it, when they see themselves forgotten, neglected, and sacrificed to unworthy rivals, affords also a fund of soothing reflections to a soul who despises it, and fears only the Lord. For, what resource is left to a sinner, who after having sacrificed his ease, his conscience, his wealth, his youth, and his health, to the world and to his masters; after having submitted in silence, to every circumstance the most mortifying to the mind, sees at once, and without knowing why, the gates of favour and advancement for ever shut against him; sees places snatched from him, to which he was entitled by his services, and of which he thought himself already certain; finds himself threatened, should he dare to murmur, with the loss of those he still enjoys, and forced to crouch to more fortunate rivals, and to be at the beck of those whom, only a little while before, he had deemed unworthy of even receiving his orders? Shall he retire far from the world, to revenge himself by eternal complaints, of the injustice of men? But of what avail will be his retirement? It will afford only more leisure for retrospection, and fewer diversions for his chagrin. Shall he try to console himself with similar examples? But our misfortunes never, as we think, resemble those of others; and, besides, what consolation can it be, to have our sorrows renewed, by seeing their image reflected from others? Shall he entrench himself in strength of mind, and in a vain philosophy? But, in

solitude, reason soon wearies of pride; we may be philosophers in public, but we are only men with ourselves. Shall he fly as a resource, to voluptuousness, and to other infamous pleasures? But in changing the passion, the heart only changes the punishment. Shall he seek, in indolence and inactivity, an happiness he has never been able to find in all the fervency of hopes and pretensions? A criminal conscience may become indifferent, but it is not thereby more tranquil. One may cease to feel misfortune and disgrace, but infidelities and crimes must always be felt. No, my brethren, the unhappy sinner is a sinner without resource. Every comfort is forever fled from the worldly, from the moment that they are deserted by the world.

But the righteous man learns to despise the world, even from the contempt which the world has for him. The injustice of men, with respect to him, only puts him in mind that he serves a more equitable Master, who can neither be influenced nor prejudiced; who sees nothing in us but what, in reality, there is; who determines our destinies upon our hearts alone, and with whom we have nothing but our own conscience to dread: that they, consequently, are happy who serve him; that his ingratitude is not to be feared; that every thing done for him is faithfully recorded; that, far from concealing or neglecting our sufferings and our services, he gives us credit even for our good wishes; and that nothing is lost with him but what is not done for him alone.

Now, in these lights of faith, what a fresh fund of consolation arises to the believer! How little is the world, in this point of view, with all its scorns and ill usage, capable of affecting him! Then it is that,

throwing himself into the bosom of God, and viewing, with Christian eyes, the nothingness and vanity of all human things, he feels in a moment all the inquietudes, inseparable from nature, changed into the sweetest peace; a ray of light shines in his soul, and re-establishes serenity; a feeling of consolation enters his heart, and every sorrow is alleviated. Ah! my brethren, how sweet to serve him, who alone can render happy, those who serve him! Why, O blessed condition of virtue, art thou not better known to man! And wherefore art thou held out as a disagreeable and sorrowful lot, when thou alone canst console the miseries and alleviate all the sufferings of his banishment?

Lastly, The judgments of the world, the source of so many mortifications to the worldly, complete still more the consolation of the believing soul. For the great source of torture to the lovers of the world, is the being continually exposed to the judgments, that is to say, to the censure, to the ridicule, and to the malignity of each other. In vain do we despise the human race: we wish to be esteemed even by those we despise. In vain are we exalted above others: the more we are exalted, the more are we exposed to the criticisms and to the observations of the multitude, and we feel much more poignantly, the censures of those from whom respect alone was to have been looked for. In vain may the suffrage of the public be in our favour; contempt is so much the more stinging, as it is unusual and rare. In vain may we retaliate with censures yet more biting and keen; resentment and revenge always suppose a sense of guilt; and, besides, the chagrin of having encountered scorn, is much more lively than any pleasure that can accrue from retort-

ing it. Lastly, From the moment that you live solely for the world, and, that your pleasures or your vexations depend wholly on it, the judgments of the world can never be indifferent to you.

In the midst of all these vexations, however, you still seek for happiness. Every thing attributed to you, either by truth or vanity, is doubted: your birth, your talents, your reputation, your services, your success, your prudence, and even your honour. If you bear an illustrious name, your descent is called in question: if you fail in business, your incapacity accounts for it: if successful, the honour is given to chance, or to your inferiors: if you enjoy the good opinion of the public, the judgment of the more knowing is appealed to, from the popular error; if possessed of the art of pleasing, it is immediately said, that you have made a thorough use of your talents, and that you have been only too agreeable: if your conduct be superior to any attack, the most poignant ridicule is directed against your temper. Lastly, Be ye whom ye may, high or low, prince or subject, the most desirable situation for your vanity, is that, of being unacquainted with the opinion of the world. Such is the life of the worldly. The same passions which bind us together, disunite us: envy and detraction blacken our noblest qualities: and our pleasures find censurers even in those who copy them

But a believer is sheltered from all these sources of uneasiness. As he courts not the esteem of men, he fears not their scorn; as he has no intention of laying himself out to please, he is not surprised to find that he has not done it. God, who sees him, is the only Judge whom he fears, and who, at the same time, consoles him for the judgments of men. His glory is

the testimony of his own conscience. His reputation he seeks in the fulfilment of his duty. He considers the suffrages of the world, as a source of danger to virtue, or as the reward of vice; and, without even paying attention to its judgments, he is satisfied with giving it good examples. Nay more. The world itself, all worldly as it is, and full of censure, malignity, and contempt for its own worshippers, is forced to respect the virtue of those who hate and despise it. It appears that virtue imprints, on the person of a truly righteous man, a dignity, a something divine, which attracts the veneration and almost the worship of worldly souls: it appears that his intimate union with Jesus Christ occasions his being irradiated, like the three disciples on the holy mount, with a part of that celestial splendour which the Father shed around his well-beloved Son, and which deprives us of the power of refusing homage. It is an unalienable right, which virtue possesses over the heart of men; and, by a deplorable caprice, the world despises the passions it inspires, and respects the virtue it strives against. Not that the esteem of the world, so worthy itself of being despised, can be any great consolation to the believer. But his consolation is, that he sees the world condemned even by the world, its pleasures decried even by those who hunt after them, sinners become the apologists of virtue, and the life of the worldly passes sorrowfully away, in doing what they condemn, and flying from what they approve.

Thus do the manners of the age become a source of consolatory reflections to the Christian; but, in the thought of futurity, he also finds consolations, which are changed into secret and continual terrors for sinners: This is another advantage drawn by the just

from the lights of faith. The magnificence of its promises sustains and consoles them: they await the blessed hope, and that happy moment when they shall be associated with the church of heaven, reunited to their brethren whom they had left on the earth, received as eternal citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, incorporated in that immortal assembly of the elect, where charity will be the law that shall unite them, truth, the flame that shall enlighten them, and eternity, the measure of their happiness.

These thoughts are so much the more consoling to the godly, as they are founded on the truth of God himself. They know that, in sacrificing the present, they sacrifice nothing; that, in the twinkling of an eye, all shall have passed away; that, whatever must have an end, cannot long endure; that this moment of tribulation ought to be reckoned as nothing, when put in competition with that eternal weight of glory which he prepareth for us; and that the rapid passage of present things, scarcely deserves that we should be at the pains of numbering the years and ages.

I know that faith may subsist with criminal manners; and that the sanctifying grace is often lost, without losing a sincere submission to the truths revealed to us by the Spirit of God. But the assurance of faith, so consoling to the righteous soul, creates only for the sinner who still believes, an inexhaustible fund of inward anxieties and cruel terrors. For, the more that sinners, like you, who bear upon your conscience, the load of a whole life of irregularity, are convinced of the truths of faith, the more inevitable must the punishments and the misery appear with which it threatens you. Every truth offered to your faith, in the holy doctrine, excites fresh alarms in your breast.

Those divine lights, which are the source of all consolation to believing souls, become, within you, only avenging lights, which disquiet, agonize, and condemn you; which hold up continually to your sight what you would wish never to see; which enlighten you, in spite of yourselves, on what you would wish to be for ever ignorant. Your faith itself constitutes your punishment before-hand. Your religion is, in this world, if I may venture to say so, your hell: and, the more you are convinced of the truth, the more unhappy do you live. O God! how great is thy goodness towards man, in having rendered virtue necessary even to his quiet, and in thus attracting him to thee, by making it impossible for him to be happy without thee!

And here, my dear hearer, allow me to recall you to yourself. Supposing even that the lot of a criminal in the next world, should not be so dreadful, see if, even in this world, it appears much to be envied: his afflictions are without resource, his evils without consolation, even his pleasures without enjoyment; his anxieties with regard to the present endless, his reflections on the past and on the future gloomy and sad; his faith is the source of all his anguish; his reason of all his despair. What a situation! What a miserable lot! What shocking changes are operated on man, both internally and externally by a single act of guilt! How dearly does he purchase eternal misery! And, is it not true that the paths of the world and of the passions are still infinitely more rough and painful than those of the gospel; and that there is more toil and vexation of spirit in gaining the kingdom of hell, if the expression be allowed, than in gaining the kingdom of heaven? O innocence of heart, what blessings dost thou not bring with thee to man! O man, what

dost thou not lose when thou losest thine innocence of heart! Thou art deprived of all the consolations of faith, the sweetest occupation of the piety of the righteous; but thou also deprivest thyself of all the comforts of grace by which the lot of the godly is rendered so truly enviable in this world.

PART II. When comforts and consolations, says St. Augustin, are promised to the worldly from an observance of the law of God, they consider our promises as a pious mode of speaking, employed to give credit and consequence to virtue; and as a heart which has never tasted of these chaste delights is also incapable of comprehending them, we are obliged, continues that holy father, to reply to them, "How "wouldest thou that we convince thee?" We cannot say unto thee: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" since a diseased and vitiated heart, can have no relish for the things in heaven. Give us an heart that loves, and it will feel the truth of every thing we say.

My design, therefore, at this time, is not so much to enlarge upon all the inward operations of grace in the heart of the just, as to contrast the happy situation in which it places them, here below, with the melancholy lot of sinners. and, by this comparison, to discountenance vice and encourage virtue. Now, I say, that grace provides two kinds of consolations in this world, to the godly; the one internal and secret, the other external and sensible; both of them so essential to happiness in this life, that no earthly gratification can ever compensate for them.

The first internal benefit accruing to the believer from grace, is the establishment of a solid peace in his heart, and a reconciliation with himself. For, my

brethren, we all bear within us natural principles of equity, of modesty, and of rectitude. We come into the world, as the apostle says, with the precepts of the law written in the heart. If virtue be not our first inclination, we, at least, feel that it is our first duty. In vain does passion sometimes undertake secretly to persuade us that we are born for pleasure; and that, after all, tendencies implanted by nature, and which every one finds within himself, can never be crimes. This foreign persuasion is ineffectual in quieting the criminal soul. It is a desire, for we would heartily wish whatever pleases us to be lawful; but it is not a real conviction. It is an opinion, for it appears honourable to be above all vulgar prejudices; but it is not a feeling. Thus, we always carry within us an incorruptible judge, who incessantly adopts the cause of virtue against our dearest inclinations; who blends with our most headstrong passions the troublesome ideas of duty, and renders us unhappy even amidst all our pleasures and abundance.

Such is the state of an impure and sullied conscience. The sinner is the secret and constant accuser of himself; go where he will, he carries a torment within, which the hand of man cannot allay. Unhappy in being unable to conquer his lawless tendencies: more unhappy still in being unable to stifle the incessant stings of remorse. Enticed by his weakness, and withheld by his reason, every crime causes a conflict within himself: he reproaches himself for the iniquitous gratification, even in the moment of its enjoyment. What shall he do? Shall he combat his reason in order to appease his conscience? Shall he doubt his faith in order to sin in tranquillity? But unbelief is a still more horrible state than even guilt. To live without

God, without worship, without principle, and without hope! To believe that the most abominable transgressions and the purest acts of virtue are merely names! To consider men only as the vile and fantastical puppets of a theatre, intended merely for the amusement of the spectators! To consider himself as the offspring of chance, and the victim of the grave! These thoughts have a certain gloom and sadness, that the soul cannot look upon without horror; and it is true, that unbelief is rather the despair of the sinner than the refuge of the sin. What, then, shall he do? Continually obliged to fly himself, lest he find himself alone with his conscience, he ranges from object to object, from passion to passion, from precipice to precipice. He thinks to compensate the emptiness and the insufficiency of pleasures by their variety; and he leaves none untried. But, in vain is his heart successively offered to created beings; all the objects of his passions reply to him, to use the language of St. Augustin, "Deceive not thy-"self in loving us; we are not that happiness of which "thou art in search; we cannot render thee happy: "raise thyself above created beings, and, mounting to "heaven, see if he who hath formed us be not greater "and more worthy of being loved than we." Such is the lot of the sinner.

Not that the heart of the just man enjoys a tranquillity so unalterable, but that he, in his turn, experiences troubles, feelings of disgust, and anxiety here below. But these are passing clouds, which shade only the surface of the soul. A profound calm always reigns within; that serenity of conscience, that simplicity of heart, that equality of mind, that lively confidence, that mild resignation, that calm of the passions, that universal peace, which make, even in this life, the felicity

of innocent souls. Vain beings of the earth, what power have ye, over an heart which you have not made, and which is not made for you? Peace of heart is therefore the first consolation of grace.

The second is love, which softens to the just all the rigours of the law, and, according to the promise of Jesus Christ, changes his yoke, so insupportable to sinners, into a sweet and consoling yoke for them. For a believer loves his God still more fervently, more tenderly, and more truly, than he had ever loved the world. Every thing, therefore, even the most rigorous, that he undertakes for him, is either no longer a trial to his heart, or becomes its sweetest care. For it is peculiar to the holy love, when master of the heart, either to assuage the sufferings it occasions, or to change them even into holy pleasures. Thus a soul enamoured of God, if I may dare to speak in this manner, pardons with joy, suffers with confidence, mortifies itself with pleasure, flies from the world with delight, prays with consolation, and fulfils every duty with an holy satisfaction. The more its love increases, the more does its yoke become easy. The more it loves, the happier it is: for it is the height of happiness to love what is become essential and necessary to us.

But with regard to the sinner, the more he loves the world, the more unhappy he is: for the more he loves the world, the more do his passions multiply, the more do his desires inflame, the more do his schemes get perplexed, and the more do his anxieties become sharpened. His love is the cause of all his evils: its vivacity is the source of all his sufferings; because the world, which is the cause of them, is incapable of furnishing him with their cure. The more he loves the world, the more is his pride stung by a preference;

the more does his haughtiness feel an injury, the more does he sink under a disconcerted project; the more does a disappointed desire afflict him, the more does an unexpected loss weigh him down. The more he loves the world, the more do pleasures become necessary to him; and, as no one can fill the immensity of his heart, the more insupportable does his weariness become: for weariness is the inseparable attendant of every pleasure; and, with all its amusements, the world, ever since it was a world, has complained of lassitude.

And think not, that, to accredit virtue, I here affect to exaggerate the misery of worldly souls. I know that the world seems to have its happiness; and that, amid all that whirlwind of cares, motions, fears, and anxieties, a few fortunate individuals are seen, whose happiness is envied, and who seem, in appearance, to enjoy a smiling and tranquil lot. But investigate these vain externals of happiness and gladness, and you will find real sorrows, distracted hearts, and agitated consciences. Draw near to these men, who, in your eyes, appear the happy of the earth, and you will be surprised to find them gloomy, anxious, and sinking under the weight of a criminal conscience. Hear them in those serious and tranquil moments, when the passions, having become more cool, allow some influence to reason: they all confess that they are any thing but happy; that the blaze of their fortune appears splendid only at a distance, and seems worthy of envy only to those who know it not. They confess that, amidst all their pleasures and prosperity, they have never been able to taste any pure and unadulterated joy; that an experience of the world shews it to be nothing; that they are astonished themselves how it can be loved when

known; and that they alone are happy in this world, who can do without it, and serve God. Some long for the opportunity of an honourable retreat; others are continually proposing to themselves more orderly and more Christian manners. All admit the happiness of the godly; all wish to become so; all bear testimony against themselves. They are the forced rather than the voluntary followers of pleasure. It is no longer inclination, it is habit and weakness which retains them in the shackles of the world and of sin. They feel this; they lament it; they acknowledge it; and yet they give way to the current of their wretched lot. Deceitful world! render happy, if in thy power, those who serve thee, and then will I forsake the law of the Lord to attach myself to the vanity of thy promises.

You yourself, who now listen to me, let me ask you, if, during the many years that you served the world, you have greatly forwarded your happiness? Put in a balance, on the one side, all the agreeable moments and days you have passed in it, and, on the other, all the sorrows and vexations you have there experienced, and see which scale will preponderate. In certain moments of pleasure, of excess, and of frenzy, you have, perhaps, said, "It is good for us to be here;" but that was only a momentary intoxication, the illusion of which the following moment discovered to you, and plunged you into all your former anxieties. Even now, when I am speaking to you, commune with your own heart: are you at peace within; is nothing wanting to your happiness? Do you fear, do you wish for nothing? Do you never feel that God is not with you? Would you wish to live and die such as you are? Are you satisfied with the world? Are you unfaithful to the Author of your being without remorse? There

are twelve hours in the day; are they all equally agreeable to you? And have you, as yet, been able to succeed in fashioning a conscience so as to remain tranquil in guilt.

Even at the moment when you have plunged to the very bottom of the sea of iniquity to extinguish your feelings of remorse, and have succeeded, as you thought, in stifling that remnant of faith which still pleads in your heart for virtue, hath not the Lord commanded the serpent, as he saith in his prophet Amos, to follow and sting you even in the abyss where you had fled for shelter? And, even there, have you not felt the secret gnawings of the ravenous worm? Is it not true that the days you have consecrated to God by some religious duty have been the happiest of your life; and that you have never lived, as I may say, but when your conscience has been pure, and when you have lived with God? No, says the prophet, with an holy pride, the God whom we worship is not a deceitful God, nor is he, like the gods which the world worships, unable to reward those who serve him: and of the truth of this, we wish no other judges than the world.

Great God! What then is man, thus to wrestle with himself, during his whole life, to wish to be happy without thee, in spite of thee, and in declaring himself against thee; to feel his wretchedness, and yet to love it; to know his true happiness, and yet to fly from it? What is man, O my God! and who shall fathom his ways, and the eternal contradiction of his actions?

Would that I could finish what I had at first intended, and prove to you, my brethren, that what renders the lot of the godly still more worthy of all our wishes, is, that when internal consolations happen to fail them,

they have still the external aids of piety to strengthen and assist them: the support of the sacrament, which, to the reluctant sinner, becomes only a melancholy tribute to decency, equally tiresome and embarrassing: the example of the holy, and the history of their wonders, from which the sinner averts his eyes, lest he see in them his own condemnation: the holy thanksgivings and prayers of the church, in which the sinner finds only a source of fatigue: and, lastly, the consolation of the divine writings, which denounce menaces and anathemas upon the sinner.

What refreshment, in fact, my brethren, does not the mind of a believer experience, when, after quitting the vain conversations of the world, where the only subjects have been the exaltation of a family, the magnificence of a building, the individuals who act a brilliant part on the theatre of the universe, public calamities, the faults of those at the head of affairs, the events of war, and the errors with which the government is continually accused, in a word, earthly subjects alone; what a refreshment, after quitting these, and in order to breathe a little from the fatigue of these vain conversations, the believer takes up the book of the law, and finds every where in it, that it matters little to man to have gained the whole world, if he thereby lose his soul; that the most vaunted conquests shall sink into oblivion with the vanity of the conquerors; that the heavens and the earth shall pass away; the kingdoms of the earth and all their glory shall wax old like a garment, but that God alone will endure for ever; and, consequently, that to him alone we ought to attach ourselves! The foolish have repeated vain things to me, O my God! says then the believer with the prophet; but, O how different from thy law!

And truly, my brethren, what soothing promises do we not find in these holy books! What powerful inducements to virtue! What happy precautions against vice! What instructive events! What sublime ideas of the greatness of God, and of the wretchedness of man! What animated paintings of the deformity of sin, and the false happiness of sinners! "We need none of "these things," wrote Jonathan and all the Jewish people to the Lacedemonians; for, "that we have the "holy books of scripture in our hands to comfort us." And who, think you, my brethren, were these men who spake in this manner? They were the unfortunate survivors of the cruelty of Antiochus, wandering in the mountains of Judea, despoiled of their property and fortunes, driven from Jerusalem and the temple, where the abomination of idols had taken place of the worship of the holy God; and, although scarcely emerged from so afflicting a situation, they are in need of nothing, for they have the holy books in their hands. And, in an extremity so new, surrounded on all hands by nations of enemies, having no longer, in the midst of their army, either the ark of Israel or the holy tabernacle; their tears still flowing for the recent death of the invincible Judas, who was alike the safeguard of the people and the terror of the uncircumcised; having seen their wives and children murdered before their eyes; they themselves on the point every day of sinking under the treachery of their false brethren, or the ambuscades of their enemies; they find the book of the law alone sufficient to comfort and defend them; and they think themselves in a situation to disclaim that assistance which an ancient treaty and alliance entitled them to demand.

I am not surprised, after this, that, in the consolation

of the scriptures, the first disciples of the gospel should forget all the rage of persecution; and that, unable to bring themselves to lose sight of that divine book during life, they should desire it to be enclosed in their tomb after death, as if to guarantee to their ashes, that immortality it had always promised to them; and, it would seem, to present it to Jesus Christ on the day of revelation, as the sacred claim by which they were entitled to heavenly riches, and to all the promises made to the righteous.

Such are the consolations of believers upon the earth. How terrible, then, my brethren, to live far from God under the tyranny of sin; to be always at war with one's self; destitute of every real joy of the heart; often with no more relish for pleasures than for virtue: odious to men through the meanness of our passions; insupportable to ourselves through the capriciousness of our desires; hated of God through the horrors of our conscience: deprived of the comforts of the sacrament, since our crimes permit us not to approach it; deprived of all consolation from the holy books, since we find in them only threatenings and anathemas; without the resource of prayer, since the practice of it is forbidden, or, at least the habit of it lost by a life wholly dissolute. What then is the sinner but the outcast of heaven and of the earth!

Would ye know, my brethren, what shall be the lamentations of the reprobate on that great day, when to each one shall be rendered according to his works? You probably think that they will regret their past felicity, and shall say, "Our days of prosperity have "slipt away like a shadow, and that world, in which "we had spent so many sweet moments, is now no "more: the duration of our pleasures has been like

"that of a dream: our happiness is flown, but, alas! "our punishments are to begin." You are mistaken; this will not be their language. Hear how they speak in the book of Wisdom, and such, as we are assured by the Spirit of God, they shall one day speak, "We have never tasted pure delight in guilt; we "have erred from the ways of truth, and the Sun of "righteousness hath never risen upon us: and yet, "alas! that was only the beginning of our misfor- "tunes and sufferings; we wearied ourselves in the "way of wickedness and destruction; our passions "have always been a thousand times more intolerable "to us than the most austere virtues could ever have "been; and we have suffered more in working our "own destruction, than would have been necessary to "secure our salvation, and to be entitled to mount up "now with the chosen, into the realms of immortality. "Fools that we are! by a sorrowful and unhappy "life to have purchased miseries which must endure "for ever!"

Would you then, my dear hearer, live happy on the earth; live as a Christian. Piety is universally beneficial. Innocence of heart is the source of true pleasures. Look on every side; there is no rest, says the Spirit of God, for the wicked. Try every kind of pleasure; they will never eradicate that disease of the mind, that lassitude and gloom, which, go where you will, continually accompany you. Cease then, to consider the lot of the godly as a disagreeable and sorrowful lot; judge not of their happiness from appearances which deceive you. You see their countenance bedewed with tears; but you see not the invisible hand which wipes them away: you see their body groaning under the yoke of penitence; but you see

not the unction of grace which mollifies it: you behold sorrowful and austere manners; but you behold not a conscience always cheerful and tranquil. They are like the ark in the desert: it appeared covered only with the skins of animals: the exterior is mean or disgusting; it is the condition of that melancholy desert. But, could you penetrate into the heart, into that divine sanctuary; what new wonders would present themselves to your eyes! You would find it clothed in pure gold: you would there see the glory of God with which it is filled: you would there admire the fragrance of the perfumes, and the fervour of the prayers which are continually mounting upwards to the Lord; the sacred fire which is never extinguished on the altar; the silence, the peace, and the majesty, which reign there; and the Lord himself, who hath chosen it for his abode, and who hath delighted in it.

Let their lot inspire you with an holy emulation. It depends altogether on yourself to be similar to them. They perhaps have formerly been the accomplices of your pleasures; why could you not become the imitator of their penitence? Establish, at last, a solid peace in your heart: begin to be weary of yourself. Hitherto you have only half-lived; for it is not living to live at enmity with one's self. Return to your God, who calls and who expects you: banish iniquity from your soul, and you will banish the source of all its sorrows; you will enjoy the peace of innocence; you will live happy upon the earth; and that temporal happiness will be only the commencement of a felicity which shall never fade away.

SERMON XXXII.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS FOR THE COMMUNION.

LUKE iii. 4.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

SUCH are the expressions continually made use of by the church, during this holy time, in order to prepare us for the birth of Jesus Christ. Prepare, says she to all her children, prepare the way of the Lord, who descends from heaven to visit and redeem his people; make his paths straight; let the hollows be filled up, and the mountains levelled; let the crooked ways become straight, and the rugged smooth. Or, to express the same meaning without metaphor: Prepare yourselves, she says to us, to gather the fruit of that grand mystery which we are going to celebrate, by humiliation of heart, meekness and charity, rectitude of intention, uniformity of living, renunciation of your own wisdom and of your own righteousness, by mortifying the flesh, and by humbling the spirit.

Allow me to hold the same language to you, my Christian brethren, who, on this solemn occasion,

come to purify yourselves in the penitential tribunals, in order to give a new birth to Jesus Christ in your hearts, on receiving him at the sacred table: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." The deed you are about to perform, is the most holy act of religion, and the source of the most special favours: undertake it not, therefore, without all the care and all the precaution it requires; do not expose yourselves, through your own fault, to lose the inestimable advantages which ought to accrue to you from it.

The communion ought to give birth to Jesus Christ in our hearts; but where would be the difference between the righteous man and the sinner, between the soul who discerns the body of the Lord, and him who treats it as common food, were he equally to have birth in the heart of all who receive him? Deceive not yourselves then, my brethren; there is a way of receiving Jesus Christ, by which his presence is rendered useless to us; and would to God, that, in thus receiving him, we deprived ourselves only of those favours which follow an holy communion! Alas! my brethren, unless the communion gives birth to Jesus Christ in our hearts, it brings death to him there; if it do not render us participators of his spirit and of his grace, it is the sentence of our condemnation; if it be not a fruit of life to our soul, it is a fruit of death: a terrible alternative which ought to excite our fears, but ought not entirely to keep us away from the sacred table. The bread which is there distributed is the true nourishment of our souls, the strength of the strong, the support of the weak, the consolation of the afflicted, the pledge of a blessed immortality: how dangerous would it then be to abstain from it? But, infinitely more so would it be, to eat it without prepa-

ration. On that account I again repeat to you, my dearest brethren, with the church, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord:" let your preparations for receiving him, be of long standing; banish from your hearts whatever may offend him; instruct yourselves with respect to the dispositions which he exacts of those who receive him; use every effort to acquire them; there are no other means of avoiding the risk of an unworthy communion, and of attracting Jesus Christ into your souls.

This is an important matter, which demands all your attention. On the one hand, you must be taught to shun the horrible crime of profaning the body and the adorable blood of Jesus Christ; on the other, you must be instructed how to reap from the communion, all the grace which it is capable of bringing forth in our hearts. What, then, are those preparations so essential towards a profitable and worthy communion? I reduce them to four, which shall be the subject and the division of this discourse.

Reflection I. The eucharist is an hidden manna; it is the food of the strong, a visible and permanent testimony of the love of Jesus Christ, and the continuation and fulfilment of his sacrifice. Now, it is necessary to know how to discern this hidden manna from common food, lest it be taken unworthily: this should be the first preparation. It is the food of the strong; we ought, therefore, to examine ourselves before we venture to make use of it: this is the second preparation. It is a testimony of the love of Jesus Christ; it can be received, therefore, only in remembrance of him, that is to say, by feeling in his presence every tender and exquisite sensation, which can be excited by the remembrance of a dear and beloved object: this is the third preparation. It is the fulfil-

ment of his sacrifice; every time, therefore, that we participate in it, we shew his death, and we ought to bring there a spirit of the cross and of martyrdom: this is the fourth preparation. A respectful faith which enables us to discern, a prudent faith which causes us to examine, an ardent faith which makes us love, an exalted faith which makes us immolate ourselves; this is the summary of the apostle's doctrine, in relating to us the institution of the eucharist, and it is likewise that of all the saints with regard to the use of that adorable sacrament.

The first preparation therefore is a respectful faith which enables us to discern. Think not, my brethren, that I mean here to speak of that faith which distinguishes us from unbelievers. Where is the merit of believing when the prejudices of childhood have accustomed reason to it, and when belief is, as it were, born with us! Exertion would even be necessary to cast off its yoke; and, to pass from faith to error, a greater effort is perhaps required than to return from error to the truth. I speak of that lively faith which pierces through the clouds, that surround the throne of the Lamb; which sees him not mystically, and, as it were, through a glass, but face to face, if I may venture to say so, such as he is: of that faith which, in spite of the veil with which the true Moses covers himself on this holy mountain, fails not, however, to perceive all his glory, and to feel the inability of supporting his presence; of that faith which, without rashly examining into his majesty, is, nevertheless, overpowered with its lustre; which sees the celestial legions covering themselves with their wings, and the pillars of the firmament shaking before this King of terrible majesty; of that faith to which the senses

could add nothing, and which is blessed, not because it believes without seeing, but because it sees almost at the instant of believing. I speak of that respectful faith which is seized with a religious trembling at the mere presence of the sanctuary, which approaches the altar as Moses did the burning bush, and the Israelites the thundering mountain; of that faith which feels the whole weight of God's presence, and cries out, in fear, like Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful "man, O Lord." I speak of that faith, the respectful feelings of which approach almost to dread, and which it is even necessary to comfort; which, from the farthest spot that it discovers Jesus Christ upon the altar, feels a sense of majesty which strikes and agitates it, and overpowers it with the fear of having ventured to approach there without permission.

Such, my brethren, is that discernment of faith, which the apostle demands of you. Great God! does any faith like this still remain on the earth? Ah! in vain dost thou still manifest thy presence to the world; it knows thee no better than formerly: thy disciples themselves often know thee not but according to the flesh; and, by being constantly with thee, their eyes become habituated, and are scarcely able to discern thee. When thou shalt shew thyself in the heavens upon a bright cloud, men shall be consumed with terror, and the impious shall seek to hide themselves in the deepest caverns, and shall call upon the mountains to cover them: but art thou not the same in the sanctuary as upon a cloud of glory? Are the heavens not opened above thee? When thy minister pronounces the awful words, do not the heavenly spirits come down from heaven to officiate as thy servants, and to surround thee with their homage? Dost thou

not judge men upon that mysterious tribunal, and cast thy discerning eyes upon that multitude of worshippers with whom temples are filled? Dost thou not, even here, separate the goats from the sheep? Dost thou not here pronounce sentence of life and death? In one hand dost thou not hold the weapons of thy wrath, and in the other crowns of glory? Dost thou not separate me there, and stamp, with an invisible hand, upon my forehead, the mark of my election or of my eternal reprobation? Alas! even while thou art perhaps condemning me, I have the presumption to draw near; while thou art casting me off from before thee, I boldly present myself before thee; while thou art perhaps laying open the abyss to mark out my place, I impudently come to take it at thy table; while thou art perhaps ranging me with the children of wrath, I seat myself among the children of thy love: thy body, which giveth life, is to me a body of death; the Lamb without stain, which breaks the seven seals of the book of death, is the last seal which fills up and closes that of mine iniquities; and thou, who shouldst be my Saviour, dost become my guilt.

Ah! my brethren, God could not be seen in former times without instant death being the consequence. A whole nation of Bethshemites was exterminated only for having too curiously examined the ark: the angel of the Lord covered Heliodorus with wounds, because he had dared to enter into the sanctuary of Jerusalem: the Israelites in the desert were not permitted even to approach the holy mountain from whence the Lord gave out his law; the thunders of heaven defended its access; and terror and death every where preceded the face of the God of Abraham. What! because whirlwinds of fire no longer burst forth to punish the intru-

ders and the profaners of our sanctuaries, should respect and dread no longer accompany us there! How weak must men be, over whom the senses have such dominion, and who are never religious but when the God whom they worship is clothed in terror! For, I ask you, were we actually to discern the body of the Lord, did the faith of his presence make those grand impressions upon us which it would undoubtedly do, were we openly to see him; ah! would we come, with coolness and tranquillity, to seat ourselves at his table? Are a few moments, employed in reciting, with a languid heart and an absent mind, some slight formula, sufficient to prepare us for an action so awful? Ought the communion to be the business of an idle morning, snatched perhaps from a customary slumber, or the vain cares of dress? Ah! my friends, the thoughts of it should long previously occupy and affect us: we should take time to strengthen ourselves, if I may venture to say so, against our own feelings of respect, and against the idea of his majesty: the days previous to this sacred festival should be days of retirement, of silence, of prayer, and of mortification: every day which brings us nearer to that blessed term, should witness the increase of our anxieties, of our fears, and of our joy. The thoughts of it should be mingled with all our affairs, with all our conversations, with all our meals, with all our hours of relaxation, and even with our sleep itself: our mind, filled with faith, should feel its inability to pay attention to any thing else; we should no longer be sensible of any thing but Jesus Christ: that image alone should fix all our attention. This it is to discern the body of the Lord.

I know that a worldly being experiences inward agitations at the approach of a solemnity on which decen-

cy, and perhaps the law, require his presence at the altar. But, O my God! thou who fathomest these troubled hearts, are these the religious terrors of faith which should accompany an humble creature to thy altar? Alas! it is the sadness which creates death; these are inquietudes that spring from the embarrassments of a conscience which requires to be cleared. Such persons are gloomy and sad, like the young man of the gospel, whom thou didst order to follow thee: they dread these blessed days as days of gloom and severity: they look upon the solemnities of Christians, as dark and melancholy mysteries: the delights of thy feast become a source of fatigue to them: they only partake of it like the blind and the lame of the gospel: that is to say, the laws of thy church must drag these faithless souls, as if by force, from the public places, from the pleasures of the age, and from the high-way of perdition, and bring them, in spite of themselves, into the hall of thy feast: they delay, as much as possible, this religious duty, and the bare thought of it poisons all their pleasures. Thou seest these unbelieving souls dragging on the load of a wavering conscience; long hesitating between their duties and their passions; softening at last, by the choice of an indulgent confessor, the bitterness of this step; appearing before thee, O God! who becomest their nourishment in this mystery of love, with as much reluctance as if they went to face an enemy; and, perhaps, in the course of a whole year, experiencing no other circumstance to grieve them, than that of receiving a God who gives himself to them. Ah! Lord, thou also dost invisibly reject these guilty victims who oblige themselves to be dragged by force to the altar, thou who willest none but voluntary sacrifices: thou also givest thyself reluc-

tantly to these ungrateful hearts who unwillingly receive thee; and, wert thou still capable of being troubled with that holy uneasiness which thou permittedst to be visible over the tomb of Lazarus, then should we once more see thee troubled in spirit when thou enterest those profane mouths which, in thy sight, are only open sepulchres, as they have long been troubled before they could prevail upon themselves to appear here to pay thee that homage.

Let us acknowledge then, my dearest brethren, that the faith which enables us to discern the body of Jesus Christ is very rare. We believe, but it is with a superficial faith, which only skims the surface, as I may say, without entering into the efficacy and the mysteries of this sacrament: we believe, but it is with an indolent faith, which grounds its whole merit in submitting without opposition: we believe, but it is with an inconstant faith, which professes to believe, but denies it in works: we believe, but it is with a human faith, which is the gift rather of our fathers according to the flesh, than of the Father of light: we believe, but it is with a vulgar faith, which leaves us only weak and puerile ideas: we believe, but it is with a superstitious faith, which tends to nothing but acts of vain and external homage: we believe, but it is with a faith arising merely from custom, which feels nothing: we believe, but it is with an insipid faith, which no longer distinguishes: we believe, but it is with a convenient faith, which is never followed by any effects: we believe, but it is with an ignorant faith, which fails either in respect through familiarity, or in love through its backwardness: we believe, but it is with a faith which enchains the mind, and leaves the heart to wander: lastly, we believe, but it is with a tranquil and

childish faith, in which there is nothing either animated, grand, sublime, or worthy of the God which it discovers to us. Ah, Lord! to discern thy body through faith, it is to prefer this heavenly bread to all the luxuries of Egypt; to render it the only consolation of our exile, the tender soother of our sufferings, the sacred remedy of all our evils, the continual desire of our souls; to find, by this means, serenity under all the frowns of fortune, peace in all our troubles, and equanimity under all the stings of adversity; to find in it an asylum against our disgraces, a buckler to repel the flaming darts of Satan, and a renovated ardour against the unavoidable lukewarmness of piety. To discern thy body, Lord, it is to devote more care, more attention, and more circumspection towards worthily receiving thee, than to all the other actions of life. To discern thy body, Lord, it is to respect the temples in which thou art worshipped, the ministers who serve thee, and our bodies which receive thee. Let every man examine himself, let him listen to the testimony of his own conscience; and this is the second preparatory step of a prudent faith, which makes us prove ourselves: "let a man examine himself."

Reflection II. I know that we are unacquainted with our own heart; that the mind of man is not always informed of what takes place in man; that the passions seduce, examples harden, and prejudices drag us away; that our inclinations are always victorious over our reason; that the heart is never in the wrong; and that, to examine one's self, is frequently only to harden one's self in error. Such is man, O my God! when delivered up to his own understanding: he is continually deceived, and nothing appears to his eyes but under fictitious colours: he but imperfectly knows

thee; he hardly knows himself: he comprehends nothing in all that surrounds him; he takes darkness for light; he wanders from error to error; he quits not his errors when he returns to himself: the lights alone of thy faith can direct his judgment, can open the eyes of his soul, become the reason of his heart, teach him to know himself, lay open the folds of self-love, expose all the artifices of the passions, and exalt him to that spiritual man, who conceives and judges of all. By the rules of faith, then, my brethren, must we examine ourselves; all human doctrines, the alleviations of custom, the examples of the multitude, our own understanding, are all deceitful guides: if ever it was of importance not to be deceived, it surely is in a conjuncture where sacrilege is the consequence of mistake.

But upon what shall we examine ourselves? Upon what! Upon the holiness of this sacrament, and upon our own corruption. It is the body of Jesus Christ, it is the bread of angels, it is the Lamb without stain, who admits none around his altar but those who either have not defiled their garments, or who have purified them in the blood of penitence. And who art thou, whom I see approaching with so much boldness and confidence? Dost thou bring there thy modesty and thine innocence? Hast thou always possessed the vessel of thy body in honour and in holiness? Has thy heart not been dragged through the filth of a thousand passions? In the sight of God, is not thy soul like that blackened brand of which the prophet speaks, which impure flames had blasted and consumed from thine earliest years, and which appears now only as the shocking vestige of their fury? Art thou not totally covered with shameful wounds? Is there a spot upon thy body free from the mark of some crime?

Where wilt thou place the body of the Lamb? What! shall it rest upon thy tongue; shall that pure and immaculate body rest upon a tomb which hath always exhaled only infection and stench; shall that body, immolated with so much gentleness, rest upon the instrument of all thy vengeance and fury; shall that crucified body rest on the seat of all thy sensualities and debaucheries? What! shall he descend to thy heart? But will he there find where to repose his head? Hast thou not changed that holy temple into a den of thieves? What! wilt thou place him among so many impure pleasures, profane attachments, ambitious projects, and emotions of hatred, of jealousy, and of pride; is it amidst all these monsters that thou hast prepared his dwelling-place? Alas! thou deliverest him up to his enemies, thou dost place him again in the hands of his executioners.

You have examined yourselves, however, you say. Before drawing near, you have made your confession. Ah! my brethren, and, with the same mouth from which you have so lately vented your iniquities, would you receive Jesus Christ? With a heart still reeking from a thousand half-extinguished passions, which to-morrow shall see in all their wonted vigour, do you dare to approach the altar with your present, and to participate in the holy mysteries? With an imagination still stained by the ideas of those recent excesses which you have just been recounting to the priest, dare you eat of the pure bread of the chosen? What! on your departure from the tribunal, shall the communion supply the place, and answer the purposes of penitence? From guilt will you rush headlong to the altar? Instead of dissolving into tears with the penitent, will you rejoice with the righteous? Instead of

nourishing yourself with the bread of tribulation, dare you run to a delicious feast? Instead of lingering at the gate of the temple, like the publican, will you confidently draw near to the holy of holies? In former times, penitents came not to the table of the Lord but after whole years of humiliation, of abstinence, of prayer, and of austerity; they purified themselves in tears, in grief, and in the public exercises of a painful discipline: they became new men; an heart-felt regret was the only vestige of their former life: no traces of their past crimes were to be recognized but in the grace of penitence, and of the mortifications which, at last, had expiated them; and the eucharist was that heavenly bread which no man, a sinner, then ate but with the sweat of his brow. And, in these days, we believe that to have confessed crimes is to have already punished them; that an absolution, which is only given under the supposition of an humbled and contrite heart, actually creates, and renders it so; that all the purity required of those who receive the body of Jesus Christ, is, that they have laid open the virulence and infection of their sores. How unworthy, my brethren, is this manner of participating in the communion! You eat and drink your condemnation: In vain may we comfort you; can man justify when God condemns?

Besides, it is pure and without leaven; it requires also that those who eat of it should be free from leaven: now, candidly, have those worldly persons, whom the circumstances of a solemnity determine to approach the holy table, quitted the old leaven in presenting themselves at the altar? Do they not still bring with them the roots of every passion? Judge of this from the consequences. On their departure from thence they find themselves exactly the same; feelings of hatred are

not extinguished, the empire of voluptuousness is not weakened, animation in the pursuit of pleasure is not blunted, inclination for the world is not less violent; in a word, cupidity has lost nothing of its rights. We use no greater precaution than before, against dangers already encountered: society again resumes its influence; amusements are renewed; the passions awaken; every thing resumes its former train, and, in addition to their former state, they have now to add the profanation of this awful mystery. How is this? It is because a simple confession is no examination of one's self.

Again, it is the food of the strong. A weak, sickly, and wavering being, who turns with every wind; who gives way to the first obstacle; who founders upon the first rock; who escapes every moment from the guidance of grace; who has a long experience of his own fragility; who brings to the altar only promises an hundred times violated, or momentary sensations of devotion, which the very first pleasure stifles; who, from his earliest years, has been in the alternate practice of errors and holy things, and who has always seen crimes succeed to repentance, and the sacrament to a relapse: can a being of this description be called strong? Is it not his duty to examine himself, to increase, to strengthen, and to exercise himself in charity? Scarcely in a state to digest milk, ought he to load himself with solid food, and such as can serve the purposes of nourishment only to the perfect man?

It is written in the law, that, if the sin-offering be placed in an earthen vessel, the vessel shall immediately be broken; but, if in a brazen vessel, it shall be both scoured and rinsed in water. Would these circumstances, so carefully and minutely marked, be

worthy of the holy Spirit, did they not contain instructions and mysteries? Doth not a weak soul, who receives the true victim, resemble that earthen vessel which falls in pieces, as I may say, being unable to endure the violence of this sacred fire? On the contrary, the firm soul, like the brass, is purified, loses in it all its stains, and comes out from it more beautiful and brilliant than before. What is the consequence, according to Jesus Christ, of putting new wine into old bottles; do they not burst, and allow the wine to be lost upon the ground? What is the application of this parable? You put the mystical wine, that wine whose strength creates an holy intoxication in pure souls, into a decayed and worn-out heart, which long-established passions have almost consumed. I am not surprised that it is unable to endure its strength, that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot tarry there, and that, on the first occasion, you shed and trample it under foot; you ought to have gradually accustomed your heart to it, to have prepared it by retirement, by prayer, by daily conquests over yourself; and, through the means of these continued and salutary trials, to have strengthened and rendered it capable of receiving Jesus Christ.

The Communion is the passover of Christians: now, Jesus Christ celebrates his passover with his disciples alone.

Now, what is it to be one of his disciples? It is to renounce one's self, to carry his cross, to follow him. Are you mortified in your desires, patient under your afflictions? Do you walk in the paths in which Jesus Christ hath walked before you? To be his disciples is mutually to love each other; and how often have you come to eat of this bread of union, how often have

you made your appearance at this banquet of charity, while your heart was inwardly loaded with gall and bitterness against your brother? How often have you come to offer up your present at the altar, without having reconciled yourself with him?

Lastly, He is a God so pure, that the stars are dimmed in his presence; so holy, that, after the fall of the angels, heaven was rent and the abyss opened that he might place an eternal chaos between sin and him; so jealous, that a single wandering desire injures and offends him. Thus, my brethren, it is necessary that you should examine yourselves with respect to your own inclinations; are not those worldly wishes, of which the apostle speaks, still nourished within you? Render glory to God, and, in his presence, search your hearts. I am about to eat of the body of Jesus Christ, and to convert it into my own substance; but, when he who knows and discerns its intentions and most secret inclinations, shall have entered into my heart, will he find nothing there unworthy of the sanctity of his presence? He will immediately proceed to the causes of my wanderings; he will examine whether their source be dried up, or their current only suspended; he will discover the ruling passions of my soul, and the weight which still turns the balance of my heart: Alas! he will then be able to say, as formerly when entering into the house of Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house!" Have I sincerely cast off that passion so fatal to my innocence; that bitterness of heart, of which I have so lately expressed my detestation at the feet of the priest; that adoration of riches, which leads me to grasp at even iniquitous profits; that madness of gaming, by which my health, my business, and my sal-

vation are injured; that vexatious and variable temper, which the slightest contradiction inflames; that vanity, which leads me to soar above the rank in which my ancestors had left me; that envy, which has always viewed with malignant eyes, the reputation and the prosperity of my equals; that proud and censorious air, which condemns all, and never judges itself; that effeminacy and voluptuousness, which possessed so powerful an influence over me, and which are, as it were, interwoven with the foundation and principle of my being? Has the avowal, which I have just made of my weaknesses, to the minister of Jesus Christ, rooted them out from my heart? Am I a new creature? He alone who is regenerated can aspire to this heavenly bread, which I am going to eat: in thine eyes am I so, O my God? Do I not bear the name of living, though still, in effect dead? Will the Mighty, entering into my soul, possess it in peace, and will he not find there seven unclean spirits who shall chase him from it? Instruct me, Lord, and suffer not thy Christ, thy Holy to descend into corruption. Such, my brethren, is the way to examine ourselves. The Lord had formerly forbidden the Jews to offer up honey and leaven in the sacrifices: see if, in approaching the altar, you bring not with you the leaven of your crimes, and the honey of voluptuousness: I mean both that relish for the world and for pleasure, and that effeminate and sensual character, the enemy of the cross, and incompatible with salvation. Approach not, if you do not feel yourself sufficiently pure: this holy body, says the prophet, would not purge your iniquity, it would only increase it; your religion would be vain, your heart idolatrous, your sacrifice a sacrilege.

Examine, therefore, yourself, and after that, eat of the heavenly bread. But we are not to be contented with merely discerning and examining. Hitherto, you have only removed the obstacles; but you have not made the last preparations: you have lopt off whatever might repel Jesus Christ from your soul; but you have not acquired what might attract him to it: you have arranged matters so as not to receive him unworthily; but you have not done so as to receive him with advantage: it is not sufficient to be free from guilt; it is necessary to be clothed with righteousness and sanctity: it is doing little, not to betray him like Judas; it is necessary to love him like the other disciples: it is doing little, in a word, to be no longer profane, worldly, voluptuous, effeminate, proud, and revengeful; it is necessary to be sedate, meek, humble, firm, chaste, believing, and a Christian.

"As often as ye do this, do it in remembrance of "me:" this is the third disposition of mind; to receive the communion in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

Reflection III. What is meant by receiving the communion in remembrance of Jesus Christ? It is, in the *first* place, to call to mind all that passed in the heart of Jesus Christ in instituting this adorable sacrament. "With desire," said he to his disciples, "I have desired to eat this passover with you before "I suffer." He sighed for that blessed moment; he never lost sight of it; in the remembrance of it, he was comforted for all the bitterness of his passion. What did he thereby mean to teach us? That we ought to bring to this divine table, an heart inflamed, penetrated, and consumed; an eager, earnest, and impatient heart; an hunger and a thirst after Jesus Christ; an inclination roused by love; in a word,

what I have termed a burning faith which impels us to love. This bread, said a father, requires a famished heart. Ah! Lord, says then the believer with St. Augustin, who will assure me that thou wilt enter into my heart to take possession of it; to fill it wholly; to reign there alone; to dwell there with me even to the end of ages; to be altogether mine; to constitute my purest delights; to shed through my heart, a thousand inward consolations; to intoxicate, to gladden it, to make me forget my miseries, my anxieties, my vain pleasures, all mankind, and the whole universe, and to leave me wholly to thee, to enjoy thy presence, thy conversation, and all the delights which thou preparest for those who love thee? Perhaps, Lord, the tenement of my soul is not sufficiently embellished to receive thee; but come and be thyself all its ornament. Perhaps thou mayest perceive stains which repel thee from it; but thy divine touch will purify them all. Perhaps thou discoverest invisible enemies still there; but art thou not the mighty? Thy mere presence will disperse them, and peace alone will reign there when once thou shalt be in possession of it. Perhaps it has wrinkles which render it forbidding; but thou wilt renew its youth, like that of the eagle. Perhaps it is still stained with the blemishes of its former infidelities; but thy blood will wash them entirely out. Come, Lord, and tarry not; every blessing will attend me with thee: despised, persecuted, afflicted, despoiled, calumniated, I will consider my sorrows as nothing from the moment that thou shalt come to alleviate them: honoured, favoured, exalted, surrounded with abundance, this vain prosperity will cease to interest me, and will appear as nothing from the moment thou shalt have made me taste how sweet

thou art. Such are the desires which ought to lead us to the altar.

But, alas! many bring there only feelings of disgust and repugnance: temptations are required to induce them to determine upon it; and of themselves they would never have thought of it. But, what do I say, temptations? Thunders and anathemas are required. Good God! that the church should be reduced through the lukewarmness of Christians, to oblige them by law to participate in thy body and blood! That penalties and threatenings should be required to lead them to thy altar, and to oblige them to seat themselves at thy table! That the Christian's only felicity on earth should be a painful precept to him! That the most glorious privilege with which men can be favoured by thee, should be an irksome restraint to them! Others approach it with an heavy heart, a sated appetite, an icy soul: such are those who live in the enjoyment equally of pleasures and of the sacrament; who participate at the table of Satan and at that of Jesus Christ; who have stated days for the Lord, and days allotted for the world: people to whom a communion costs only a day of restraint and reservation; who, on that day, neither gamble, shew themselves, see company, nor speak evil. But this exertion goes no further; all devotion ceases with the solemnity; it is a deed of ceremony; after this short suspension they are at ease with themselves; they tranquilly return to their former ways; for that was a point agreed upon with themselves; they continue to live in this mixture of holy and profane: the sacrament make us easy with respect to our pleasures, and our pleasures that we may be more tranquil in conscience, lead us to the sacrament; and thus men are good in part, in

order to be worldly without scruple. They thus bring to the altar, a taste depraved by the amusements and the delights of the age, with the embarrassments of affairs, and the tumult of the passions: they feel not the ineffable sweets of this heavenly food; they retrace, even at the foot of the throne of grace, the images of those pleasures, they have so lately left: interests which occupy us, projects which embarrass us, ideas which force us from the altar, to drag us back to the world, make much deeper impressions upon the heart than the presence of Jesus Christ. But is it not, Lord, against these Christian monsters that thy prophet, formerly said to thee with indignation, "Ah! Lord, let thy table become a snare before them; "and that which should have been for their welfare, "let it become a trap."

In the *second* place, to receive the communion in remembrance of Jesus Christ, is to wish to awaken, through the presence of this sacred pledge, every impression which his memory can make upon a heart which loves him. The firmest bonds are loosened by absence: Jesus Christ well foresaw, that, ascending up to heaven, his disciples would insensibly forget his kindnesses and his divine instructions. Alas! Moses remained only forty days upon the mountain, and how soon did the Israelites cease to remember the miracles that he had wrought to deliver them from Egypt. "We wot not," said they among themselves, "what is become of this Moses, the man that brought "us out of the land of Egypt; let us make gods who "shall go before and defend us against our enemies." To guard against these inconstancies of the human heart, our Saviour wished, in ascending to the heavenly Sion, to leave us a pledge of his presence: he

wishes us to come there to console ourselves for his sensible absence; it is there that we ought to find a more lively remembrance of his wonders, of his doctrine, of his kindnesses, and of his divine person; it is under these mysterious signs, that we see him born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, holding discourse with men, and traversing the cities of Judea, working signs and miracles which no one before him had ever done, calling, for his followers, rude disciples, in order to make them masters of the world, confounding the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, announcing salvation to men, leaving marks every where of his power and goodness, entering in triumph into Jerusalem, led to mount Calvary, expiring upon a cross, the conqueror of death and of hell, leading with him into heaven those who were captives, as the trophies of his victory, and forming afterwards his church with the overflowing of his Spirit and the abundance of his gifts; in a word, we shall there find him in all his mysteries.

You envy, said St. Chrysostom, the lot of the diseased woman who touched his garments, of the sinful one who bathed his feet with her tears, of the women of Galilee who had the happiness to follow and to serve him in the course of his ministry, of his disciples with whom he familiarly conversed, of the people of those times who listened to the words of grace and of salvation which proceeded from his mouth; you call those blessed who saw him; many were the prophets and kings who wished this in vain; but you, my brethren, have only to come to the altars, and you shall see him; you shall touch him; you shall give him an holy kiss, you shall bathe him with your tears, and your bowels shall bear him even like those of Mary. Alas! our fathers went into the holy land, to worship the traces

of his feet, and the places that he had consecrated with his presence. Here, (they were told,) he proposed the parable of the good shepherd and the lost sheep; here he pardoned an adultress; here he comforted a sinful woman; here he sanctified the marriage and the feast with his presence; here he multiplied the loaves to fill a famished multitude; here he checked his disciples who wanted to bring fire from heaven upon a criminal city; here he deigned to hold converse with a woman of Samaria; here he suffered the children around him, and rebuked those who wanted to drive them away; here he restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, delivered those possessed with devils, made the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear. At these words our fathers felt themselves transported with an holy joy; they shed tears of tenderness and religion upon that blessed land; this sight, these images, carried them back to the times, to the actions, to the mysteries of Jesus Christ, inspired them with fresh ardour, and consoled their faith; sinners found there a sweet trust, the weak a new force, and the righteous new desires.

Ah! Christians; it is not necessary to cross the seas; salvation is near you; the word which we preach to you will be, if you wish it, upon your mouth and in your heart: open the eyes of faith, behold these altars; they are not places consecrated formerly by his presence; it is Jesus Christ himself: approach in remembrance of him; rekindle all that your heart hath ever felt of tender, affecting, and lively, for this divine Saviour. Let the remembrance of his meekness, which would not permit him to break the reed already bruised, nor to extinguish the yet glimmering lamp, quiet your transports and impatience: let the remembrance of his

toils and of his life of troubles rebuke your effeminacy: let the remembrance of his modesty and of his humility, which made him fly when they wished to give him the title of king, cure you of your schemes of vanity, and of your frivolous pretensions: let the remembrance of his fast of forty days, make you abjure your sensual pleasures: let the remembrance of his zeal against the profaners of the temple, teach you with what respect, and with what holy dread you ought to enter there: let the remembrance of the simplicity and the frugality of his manners, condemn the vain superfluities and the excesses of yours: let the remembrance of his retirement and of his prayers, warn you to fly the world, to retire sometimes into the secrecy of your house, to pass, at least, some portion of the day in the indispensable practice of prayer: let the remembrance of his tender compassion for a famished people, give you bowels of commiseration for the unfortunate: let the remembrance of his holy conversation, teach you to converse innocently, piously, and profitably with men: in a word, let the remembrance of all his virtues, which become at that moment more lively, and more present to the heart, and to the mind, correct you of all your weaknesses: this is what is meant by communicating in remembrance of him.

But, to bring continually to the altar the same foibles; to familiarize ourselves in such a manner with the body of Jesus Christ, that it no longer awakens in us new feelings, but leaves us always such as we are; to nourish ourselves with a divine food, yet not to increase; to approach this burning furnace without any additional heat to your lukewarmness; to appear there with faults abjured an hundred times, yet still dear, with habits of imperfection, which, though light in them-

selves, are no longer so, however, through the attachment and inclination which render them inevitable to us, and through the circumstance of the sacrament which we run a risk of profaning; to make professions of piety, of estrangement from the world, to be almost every day in the company of holy things, and to have determined, as it were, upon a limited point of virtue beyond which we never mean to rise, and, after ten years exercise of piety, to be no farther advanced than at first, but on the contrary, to have rather relaxed from the first fervour; to be continually applying to this divine remedy, yet to feel no alteration for the better in the disease; to heap sacrament upon sacrament, if I dare to say so, yet never to empty the heart in order to make room for this heavenly food; to nourish feelings of envy and animosity, secret attachments, sensuality, vain desires to please, to be courted, and to be prosperous; to permit, in conversation, a habit of witticisms and a freedom of speech upon others, profane sentiments, quibbles which wound sincerity, concealments by which falsehood becomes familiar, hastiness and bursts of passion; to be jealous to an extreme wherever self is concerned; to rise indignant at the smallest appearance of neglect, and to be incapable of digesting a single disobliging look; and yet, with all this, to feed upon the bread of angels; O my God! how much less than this ought to make us tremble!

But, do we eat of this bread unworthily, when we eat of it with so many imperfections and weaknesses? Who can say, O Lord, but thee? All that we know is, that this is not to communicate in remembrance of thee; that many acts of righteousness shall appear in thy sight, at the great day, as a soiled cloth; that many, who had even prophesied in thy name, shall be

rejected; and that every thing is to be dreaded in this state. Peter was not admitted to thy supper till after thou hadst washed his feet; and yet thou hast assured us that he was altogether pure. Magdalene was sent away, and thou didst not permit her to touch thee, because a too sensible affection was the cause of her eagerness; and yet her love had been great, and she had washed thy sacred feet and her own sins with her tears. And we, Lord, full of wants, devoid of the fruits of penitence, made up wholly of effeminacy and sensuality, lukewarm and without desire, fixed in a state of languishing and imperfect piety, more sustained by habit and the engagements of a holy profession than by thy grace, or by a lively and solid faith, alas! we make thy body our ordinary food. What an abyss, O Lord! What a train of crimes, perhaps, unknown, unrepented of, multiplied to infinity, and which are as the stock upon which a thousand new profanations are afterwards grafted! What an abyss, I again repeat! And what terrible secrets shall thy light make manifest to us at the great day! In thy sight, O my God, what am I! I can neither offend nor please thee by halves; my condition admits not of those middle states of virtue which hold, as it were, a mid way between innocence and guilt; if not a saint, I am a monster; if not a vessel of honour, I am a vessel of shame; if not an angel of light, there is no room to hesitate, I am an angel of darkness; and, if not a living temple of thy spirit, I must be its profaner. Good God! what powerful motives for vigilance, for self-examination, for circumspection, for terror when approaching thine altars; for humility, tears, and compunction, while waiting the manifestation of thine adorable judgments! But, my brethren, it is not yet enough to receive the commu-

nion in remembrance of Jesus Christ; in order to retrace his life, it is likewise necessary to renew the remembrance of his death, and to shew him whenever we eat of his body and drink of his blood; this is the last disposition, and is what I have called the exalted faith which leads us to the sacrifice.

Reflection IV. "As often as you shall eat of the "body and drink of the blood of the Lord, you will "shew his death until the kingdom of God shall come." How is this? Literally speaking, his death is shewn, because this mystery was a prelude to his passion; because Judas there determined to betray him; because Jesus Christ, eager to undergo that baptism of blood with which he was to be baptized, anticipated its fulfilment, and sacrificed himself beforehand by the mystical separation of his body and of his blood; because the eucharist is the permanent sacrifice of the church, the fruit and the fulness of that of the cross: lastly, because Jesus Christ is there as in a state of death; he hath a mouth and speaks not; eyes and uses them not; feet and walks not. But, my brethren, in that sense the impious, equally with the just man, shews the death of the Lord as often as he eats of his body: it is a mystery, and not a merit; it is the nature of the sacrament, and not the privilege of him who receives it; it is a consequence of its institution, and not a disposition for approaching it. Now, the design of the apostle is to prevent abuses, to instruct believers how to eat worthily of the body of the Lord, to explain to them, in the mysteries contained in this sacrament, the dispositions which it requires. There is a way, therefore, of shewing the death of the Lord, which should be wholly in our hearts, which disposes and prepares us, fits the situation of our soul to the nature

of this mystery, makes us to bear upon our body the mortification of Jesus Christ, and immolates and crucifies us with him. Let us resume the reasons we have touched upon, and leave the letter for the spirit of the gospel.

The death of the Lord is shewn, in the first place, because this mystery was a prelude to his passion. In former times the eucharist was a prelude to martyrdom. From the moment that the rage of the tyrant was declared, and the persecution begun, all the believers ran to provide themselves with this bread of life; they carried this precious trust into their houses: death seemed less terrible to them when they had before their eyes the beloved pledge of their immortality; they even desired it; and the ineffable consolations which the presence of Jesus Christ, hidden under mystical veils, already shed through their souls, made them long for that torrent of delight with which he will overflow his chosen when they shall behold him face to face. Were they dragged to prison, and, like felons, loaded with irons, they carefully concealed the divine eucharist in their bosom; they feasted upon it in the hope of martyrdom; they grew fat upon this heavenly food, like pure victims, that their sacrifice might be more pleasing to the Lord. Chaste virgins, fervent believers, holy ministers, partook altogether of the blessed bread: and what delight did they not find even in their chains! What serenity of mind in those dark and gloomy abodes! What songs of thanksgiving in those horrible places where the eye encountered nothing but the sad images of death, and preparations for the most cruel tortures! How often did they say to Jesus Christ, when present with them in this adorable sacrament: Ah! Lord, we fear no ill, since thou art with

us: though hosts surround us, yet will we not be afraid; our enemies may destroy our bodies, but thou wilt restore them to us glorious and immortal; for who can destroy those whom the Father hath bestowed upon thee? Blessed chains which thou deignest to sustain! Holy prisons which thou consecratest with thy presence! Beloved dungeons in which thou fillest our souls with so many lights! Precious death which is to unite us with thee, and to withdraw the veil which conceals thee from our sight! Then what fortitude were they not inspired with under their tortures! Filled with the body of Jesus Christ, washed in his blood, they quitted their prisons, says St. Chrysostom, like lions from their den raging and thirsting for death and carnage; they flew upon the scaffolds, and with an holy pride, cast around them looks of confidence and magnanimity which appalled the most ferocious tyrants, and even disarmed their executioners: they shewed then the death of the Lord in preparing themselves for martyrdom by the communion.

The tranquillity of our own times, and the religion of the Cesars leave us no longer the same hope; death is no longer the reward of faith, and the eucharist makes no more martyrs: but have we not domestic persecutors? Has our faith only tyrants to dread? And is there not a martyrdom of love as well as of blood? In approaching the altars then, my brethren, a believing soul sighs for the dissolution of his mortal body; for, could he love this life, and at the same time shew the death of Jesus Christ, and renew, in these mystical signs, his departure from the world to go to his Father? He complains of the length of his exile; he bears, to the foot of the sanctuary, a spirit of death and of martyrdom: "Ah! Lord, since thou art dead and cruci-

"fied to the world, why detain me here? What can I "find upon the earth worthy of my heart, seeing thou "art no longer there? The mystery itself, which "should console me through thy presence, recalls to "me thy death: these covers which veil thee are an "artifice of thy love; and thou half concealest thyself, "only to inspire my heart with the desire of fully be- "holding thee. Vain beings, what offer ye to me, "but an empty shadow of the God whom I seek? "What answer do ye make when my softened heart "bends towards you to soothe its anxieties? Return, "say you, to him who hath made us; we await with "anxiety, his coming to deliver us from this servitude, "which makes us subservient to the passions and to "the errors of men: seek him not among us, thou wilt "not find him, he is risen, he is no longer here; if "he appear, it is only to die again; recall the desires "and the affections which thou meant to place upon "us, and turn them towards heaven; the bridegroom "hath been carried away, the earth, to the eyes of a "Christian, is now but a vale of mourning and tears: "thus do they answer me. What then detains me "here, Lord? What are the ties and charms which "can attach me to the world? Restless in plea- "sures, impatient in absence, tired of the conversa- "tion and the society of men, afraid of solitude; "without relish for the world, without relish for vir- "tue; doing the evil I would not, and leaving undone "the good that I would; what keeps me here? What "delays the dissolution of this body of sin? What "prevents me from soaring with the wings of the "dove upon the holy mountain? I feel that I should "then be happy; I could then feast at all times upon "this delicious bread: I taste no real delight but at

"the feet of thy altars; these are, indeed, the happiest moments of my life: but they are short, and I must soon return to the fatiguing insipidity of the world; I am under the necessity of being too long absent from thee: no, Lord, there is no perfect happiness on the earth, and death is a gain to whoever loves thee."

Are these our sentiments, my brethren, when we draw near to the altar? Where now can we find the Christians, who, like the first believers, await the blessed hope, and hasten, by their sighs, the end of their banishment, and the coming of Jesus Christ? This is a refinement of piety of which men have no idea; it is merely speculative language; it is, however, the groundwork of religion, and the first step of faith. The necessity of dying is considered as a cruel punishment; the bare idea of death, with which our fathers were so comforted, makes us shudder; the end of life is the end of our pleasures, in place of being that of our sufferings; the attentions paid to the body are endless; our precautions extend even to absurdity; or, if it sometimes happen that this last moment is desired, it is in consequence of being wearied of life and of its chagrins, in consequence of disgrace, of an habitual infirmity preying upon us, of a revolution in our worldly matters which leaves no more pleasures to be expected here below, of the loss of an establishment, of death, of an accident, or, lastly, it may arise from disgust and self-love; we tire of being unfortunate, but we are not eager to be reunited with Jesus Christ; and, with all this, we eat of the Lord's supper, we renew the remembrance of his passion, and shew his death until he shall come: What an outrage!

Secondly, His death is shewn in this mystery, because at the Lord's supper, Judas finally determined upon delivering him up. Now, what does this remembrance exact of us? Ah! my brethren, an ardent desire of repairing, by our homage, the impiety of so many communicants by whom our Saviour is crucified afresh. Many are the unworthy ministers who offer him up, wherever his name is known, with sacrilegious hands: many are the impure, revengeful, and worldly-minded sinners, of every people and of every nation, who receive him into profane mouths: we ought therefore to feel the insults which Jesus Christ thereby suffers; to humble ourselves before him, seeing that his most signal blessing is become the occasion of the greatest crimes; to tremble for ourselves; to admire his goodness, which, for the profit of a small number of chosen, hath graciously been willing to submit to the indignities of that endless number of sinners, of all ages and of all times, who have dishonoured, and still continue to dishonour him; to avert, by the tears of our heart and a thousand inward lamentations, the scourges which unworthy communicants never fail to draw down upon the earth. For, if the apostle formerly lamented that general plagues, epidemical diseases, and sudden deaths, were only a consequence of the profanation of the sacrament; thy finger has long been upon us, Lord; the cup of thy wrath is poured out upon our cities and provinces: thou armest kings against kings, and nations against nations: nothing is now spoken of but battles and the rumours of war; our fields are stricken with sterility; our families are consumed by the sword of the enemy, and the father is deprived of the only prop and consolation of his old age; we groan under burdens, which, though

keeping the enemy of the state from our walls, yet leave us a prey to famine and want; the arts are now almost useless to the people; commerce languishes, and industry can hardly supply the common necessaries of life; yet what are even the public calamities, when compared with the private miseries known to thee alone? We have seen our citizens mowed down by hunger and death, and our cities turned into frightful deserts; the enemy of thy name takes advantage of our dissensions, and usurps thine inheritance.

Whence, O God! proceed these continued and terrible scourges? Where are those clouds of wrath and indignation formed, which have so long been pouring out their torrents upon us? Is it not to punish the sacrilegious that thou art armed? do not the outrages which are every day committed against thy body, at the foot of the altar, draw down upon us these marks of thy wrath? O strike us then, Lord, and avenge thy glory; stop not the arm of thy angel who hovers over us; let not the houses be spared where the traces of profane blood are still imprinted: Thine anger is just. But no, give us not the water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against thee: give peace to our days; listen to the cries of the righteous who entreat it of thee: "Lord," say they with the prophet, "we looked for peace, but no good came; "and for a time of health, and behold, trouble." Terminate the profanations which are ever the attendants of war; cease to punish sacrileges by multiplying them on the earth; once more restore majesty to so many polluted temples, worship and dignity to so many despoiled churches, peace to our cities, abundance to our families, consolation and gladness of heart to Israel; let the child be restored to his father,

and the husband to the desolate wife; and, if our evils touch thee not, suffer thyself, O Lord, to be moved by the miseries of thy church.

Thirdly, The death of the Lord is shewn in this mystery; for Jesus Christ sacrifices himself in it, by the mystical separation of his body and blood. What follows from thence? That we must be at the foot of the altar as if we were at the foot of the cross: that we must enter into the feelings of the disciples and of the women of Jerusalem who received the dying sigh of Jesus, and were present at the consummation of his sacrifice. Now, what hatred did they not feel for a world which had crucified their Master? What measures did they think it necessary to keep with his murderers? Were they afraid of declaring themselves the disciples of him who had so openly declared himself their Saviour, and that at the price of his blood? Did they not say to the heavenly Father, Ah! strike us, Lord, who are the guilty, and spare the innocent. What horror did they not feel for their past faults, which had brought so good a Master to the cross! What a lively impression in their heart of his sufferings! Thus, my brethren, to keep on terms with the world, to be afraid of declaring openly for piety; to be ashamed of the cross of Jesus Christ; to calculate your works of devotion in such a way that an air of the world may still pervade the whole; to confess Jesus Christ with timidity; to be afraid of abstaining from a theatre where he is insulted, from an assembly where he is offended, from a proceeding by which innocence must suffer, from a certain train of life which the world makes necessary to you, from certain maxims which wound the gospel, and which custom has established as laws; to pretend to keep up all those conciliatory

measures with the world, and yet to eat the passover with the disciples of Jesus Christ; to preserve a correspondence with his enemies, and yet to seat yourselves at his table; to esteem the maxims which crucify him, and yet to wish to be the spectators and the faithful companions of his cross: This is a melancholy inconsistency.

He hath overcome the world; he hath fixed it to his cross; he hath made its maxims and errors expire with him: consequently, to shew his death in the communion is to renew the memory of his victory. And, if the world lives and still reigns in your heart, my brother, do you not annihilate the fruit of his death? Do you not contest with Jesus Christ the honour of his triumph? And, in place of shewing his death, do you not renew it with his enemies?

Besides, in the *fourth* place, his death is shewn in this mystery, for it is the consummation of the sacrifice of the cross, and he applies the fruit of it to us. Now, what gives us a right to the fruit of the cross, and, consequently, to the communion? Suffering, mortification, and a penitent and spiritual life. For, tell me, living as you do in delights, how can you dare to shew the death of our Saviour? How can you dare to nourish a body, like yours, enervated by pleasures, flattered and caressed; how can you dare, I say, to nourish it with a crucified body? How can you dare to incorporate Jesus Christ, dying and crowned with thorns, with your delicate and sensual members? Would not this connexion be horrible? Would you dare, by converting his body into your own substance, to transform it into an effeminate and voluptuous body? Ah! this would be the perfection of iniquity. To be nourished with the body of Jesus Christ, your members must be-

come his members; his body must take the figure of your body. Now, his body is a crucified body; his members are suffering members; and, if you live without suffering; if you bear not upon your body the mortification of Jesus Christ; if, as is probable, you have never practised a single instance of self-denial; if your days are passed in a tranquil effeminacy; if afflictions excite impatience; if you feel hurt at every thing which opposes your honour; if you prescribe to yourself no works of mortification; if those sent to you by heaven are unwillingly and unthankfully received; how can you dare to unite your body to that of Jesus Christ? We never reflect upon this, my brethren; and yet it is plain that a soft and sensual life can be a presage only of an unworthy communion.

Lastly, The death of the Lord is shewn in this mystery, for he is there himself in a state of death. He hath mouth and speaketh not; eyes and useth them not; feet and walketh not. Observe then, my brethren, and act according to this model; learn from this how you ought to shew his death in partaking of his body: you must bring there eyes closed for the earth; a tongue accustomed to silence, or to the sayings of God, to use the expression of St. Paul; feet and hands immoveable for the works of sin; senses either extinguished or mortified: in a word, you must bring there an universal death of the body: the state of Jesus Christ in the eucharist is the state of the Christian on earth; a state of retreat, of silence, of patience, of humiliation, of divorce from the senses. For, what is Jesus Christ in the eucharist? He is in the world as if not there; he is in the midst of men, but invisible; he hears their vain conversation, their chimerical plans, their frivolous expectations, but he enters not into them; he sees

their solicitudes, their agitations, and their enterprises, and he does not interfere; men worship and insult him; and, being always the same, he appears insensible alike to their insults as to their homage: he looks on while families, empires, and ages are renewed, manners are changed, the taste of men and of ages are incessantly fluctuating; customs sink into decay and then revive; the figure of this world in an eternal revolution; his inheritance divided; wars, seditions, and unexpected revolutions; the whole universe shaken; and he is tranquil upon its ruins; nothing withdraws him from his close and ineffable study of his Father; and nothing interrupts the divine quiet of his sanctuary, where he is always living for the purpose of interceding for us. Once more, consider and act according to this model: let us bring to the sacred table eyes long since closed upon every thing which may hurt our soul; a tongue surrounded with a guard of circumspection and of modesty; ears chaste and impenetrable to the hissings of the serpent, and to the luxury of those sounds and voices so calculated to soften the heart; a soul alike insensible to scorn or to praise; beyond the reach of the things of this earth, and proof against all the revolutions of life; the same in good or in bad fortune; viewing, with indifferent eyes, every occurrence here below; esteeming the good or the evil which occur as a matter that does not regard us; and, through all the agitations of the earth, the tumult of the senses, the contradiction of tongues, and the vain enterprises of men, always watchful over our peace of heart, to move continually with a steady pace towards eternity, never to lose sight of God, and to have our conversation always fixed on heaven.

Not that I would exclude from the altar, all those who have not yet attained to this state of death: alas!

it is the business of a whole life; and the body of Jesus Christ is an aid established to fortify and to assist us in this undertaking. But, our inclination ought to bend to it, lest we approach the altar unworthily; we must be at open war with the senses, with our own corruption, and with our own weaknesses, and be continually gaining the advantage in some article; Christian self-denial must be practised; the daily victories, which the impressions of the world and of the senses gain over us, must be expiated by retirement, by silence, by tears, and by prayer; we must rise with fresh vigour from every error. But, I wish to make you understand that a communion is not the concern of a day, or of a solemnity; that our whole life ought to be a preparation for the eucharist; that all our actions should be so many steps which lead us up to the altar; that the life of too many in the world, even of those who are not in debauchery, who restrict themselves in nothing, who live according to the senses, and who are eager only for the interests of the earth, is a life which shews not the death of the Lord, and which, consequently, excludes you from this mystery. I wish you to comprehend, that the eucharist is a festival, if I dare to say so, of mourning and death; that delights, pleasures, and vain decorations disfigure this sacred table, and occasion your being rejected equally with him who appears there with a soiled and tattered garment: that the meats of the earth and the bread of heaven cannot be eaten at the same time; as, on the morrow after the Israelites had eaten of the old corn of the land of Canaan, the manna ceased, neither had they any more of that heavenly food. I wish you to comprehend, that this sacrament is the fruit and not the mark of penitence; that those communions which depend upon a solemnity, give rise to more profaners

than true worshippers; that the body of Jesus Christ cannot be eaten without living by his spirit; that the plenitude of the holy Spirit must rest upon the soul, as upon Mary, before Jesus Christ can enter into it, to assume, as it were, once more the human nature. I wish you to comprehend, that the reading of the holy books, and the salutary rigours of penitence, should prepare an abode in our hearts for Jesus Christ, to the end that we may be like holy arks, and that this heavenly manna may rest there amidst the tables of the law and the rod of Aaron. I wish you to understand, that nothing should alarm you more, who live in the dangers of the world, and who love them, than the partaking of the communion without preparation. I wish you to understand, that the bread of life becomes a poison to the majority of believers; that the altars witness as many crimes as the theatre; that Jesus Christ is more insulted in his sanctuary, than in the assemblies of sinners; and that these solemnities are become only mysteries of mourning for him, and days set apart to dishonour him. I wish you, in a word, to understand, that, in order to approach it worthily, that respectful faith is required which enables us to discern; that prudent faith, which leads us to examine ourselves; that lively faith, which causes us to love; that noble faith, which induces us to sacrifice ourselves: and that without these, we render ourselves guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; we eat and drink our own condemnation.

Ah, Lord! how little have I hitherto known the innocence and the extreme purity which thou requirest of those who come to eat of this heavenly food! The Centurion, whose faith was so fervent, so humble, and so enlightened; who was so rich in good

works, who loved thy people, raised up edifices to thy name, and appropriated them to public prayers, and to the interpretation of thy scriptures; he does not think himself worthy even to receive thee in his house: even the purest of virgins, when informed by the angel, that thou wert to descend into her womb, is terrified at it; she contemplates her own nothingness; and, all the power of speech that remains to her, is exerted in asking, how can this be? And who am I, Lord, that dare to seat myself at thy table with so little precaution? I, who appear empty before thee; who have nothing to offer thee but the remains of a heart so long engrossed by the world; who am thine only by intervals, and who still leave to earthly beings and to the passions the main part of my heart; who bring to thine altars only weak essays of salvation, and consummated works of sin; who have nothing above other sinners but the abuse of thy blessings, unavailing lights, sentiments which evaporate in vain wishes, a thousand inspirations, which gain nothing from me but fruitless steps to conversion, a heart incapable of familiarizing itself either with sin or with virtue, a disposition naturally good, and almost intuitively inimical to excess and to vice, and which I have, nevertheless, spoiled.

Ah, Lord! the fruits of a holy communion are so abundant, and so sensible; the soul quits it so much overflowed with thy blessings and thy grace, that, had I no other proof of the unworthiness of my communions than their inefficacy, I ought to tremble and be humbled. When thy body is eaten worthily, we are told that the hunger is not allayed; and I withdraw from that sacred table wearied out, and tired of mine homage: I breathe, on quitting it, as on quitting a ceremonious task: I congratulate myself that it is over, as I would do on being rid of a painful undertaking; and,

if I feel any relish excited, it is for the world and its pleasures. When thy body is eaten worthily, we abide in thee, and thou abidest in us; that is to say, thy precious blood, which still flows in our veins, leaves us thy inclinations, thy traits, and thy resemblance; we feel that we are another thee; noble and heavenly inclinations should alone be seen in us, and sentiments worthy of the blood we have received: I find in me, nevertheless, only terrestrial desires, mean and groveling tendencies, and a heart crawling in the dirt, and incapable of soaring above the earth, and of returning to thy bosom from whence it came. When thy body is eaten worthily, thou hast taught us that we live for thee, and that we live eternally; I have, nevertheless, continued to live for the world, for myself, for those around me, for my pleasures, for my schemes of advancement, for mine affairs, for a family, for children, for my glory; and for thee, scarcely have I lived a single moment in the day. What then must I do, Lord? Must I retire from thy table? Shall this fruit of life be forbidden me? Shall the bread of consolation no longer be broken for me? No, Lord, thou dost not mean to exclude me from it; thou only desirest to make me worthy of it; thou refusest me not the bread of children, but thou desirest that mine unworthiness may force thee to give me a serpent in its stead. Prepare then thyself an abode in mine heart worthy of thee; make the crooked ways straight, and let the heights be levelled; purify my desires; correct my inclinations, or rather create within me new ones. Thou alone canst be thy precursor, and prepare the way for thee in the souls of men. Fill us then, Lord, with thy spirit, to the end that we may eat of thy body worthily, and live eternally for thee. Amen.

FINIS.

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